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TEN YEARS ON:
THE NDB'S GROWING ROLE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

AI FOR AFRICA:
FROM STRATEGY TO INCLUSIVE IMPACT

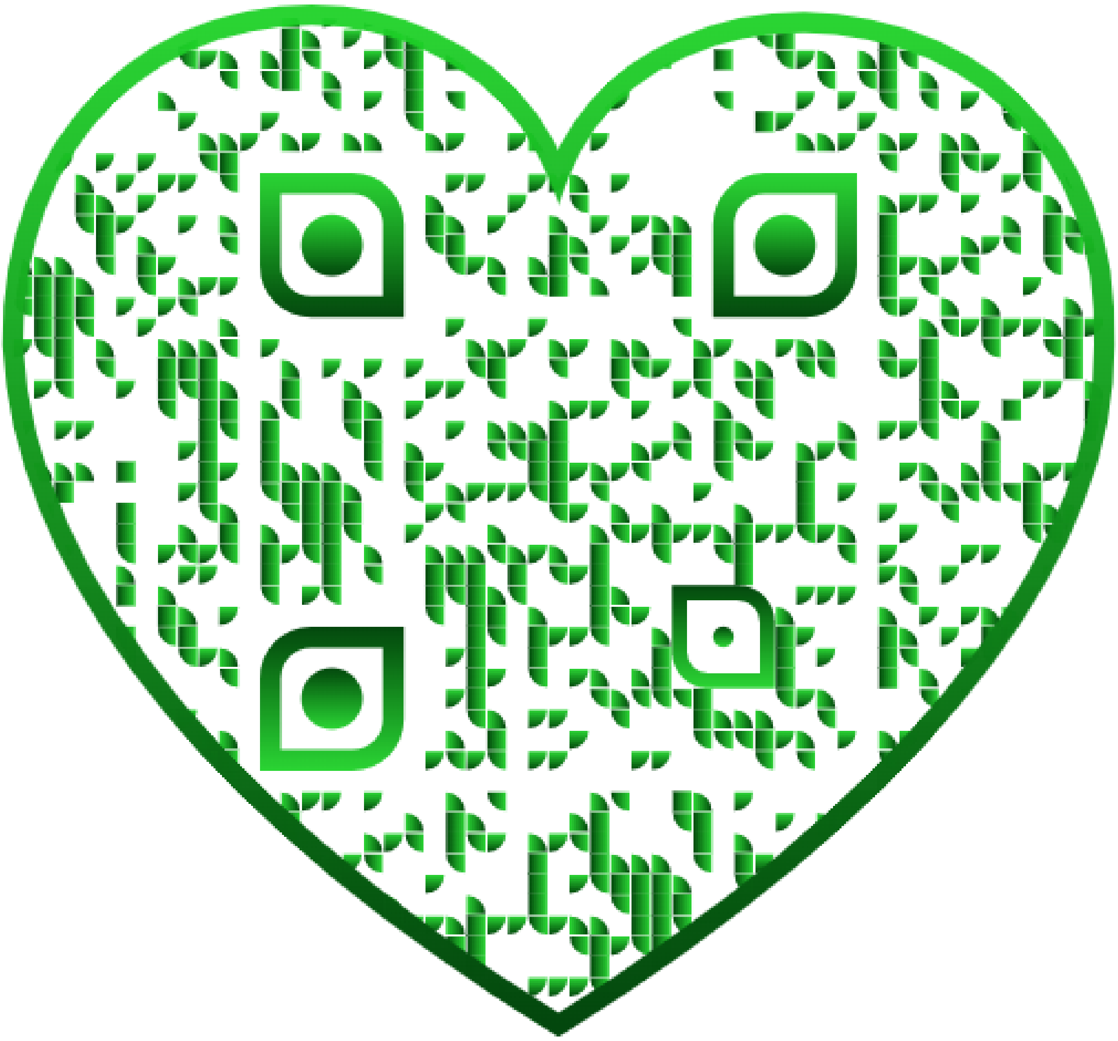
TRADE IN TRANSITION:
A 2025 REFLECTION AND THE ROAD TO 2030

BRICS & THE GLOBAL SOUTH

SPECIAL G20 EDITION

BRICS+
CONSULTING GROUP

G20
SOUTH AFRICA 2025



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BRICS & THE GLOBAL SOUTH

SPECIAL G20 EDITION

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Saarah Survé

OPERATIONS MANAGER
Paul Myburgh

SALES MANAGER
Mike Ntsasa
mike.ntsasa@volt.africa

WRITERS
Cole Jackson
Chloé Maluleke
Sesona Mdlokovana

HEAD OF DESIGN
Phumlani Thusi

DESIGNERS
Rowan Abrahams
Cameron Magolie

PHOTOGRAPHY
Independent Media
Ya'eesh Collins
Hannah Gilbert
Ian Lansberg
Ayanda Ndamane

PRODUCTION
Reshalin Naidoo

PRINTER
CTP Printers

WEBSITE
bricscg.com

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EDITOR'S NOTE

FROM JOHANNESBURG TO THE WORLD: THE GLOBAL SOUTH TAKES THE STAGE

Welcome to the launch issue of *BRICS & The Global South* – a magazine born out of a shared belief that the world's next great stories of growth, innovation, and resilience are being written across the Global South.

This inaugural edition arrives at a pivotal moment: as BRICS expands, the G20 redefines global governance, and developing nations increasingly shape the agenda for sustainable, inclusive progress. Fittingly, this year's G20 Summit takes place in Johannesburg, South Africa, under the theme "Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability" – a timely reminder that our collective future depends on cooperation across borders, sectors, and generations.

The Global South is no longer a peripheral actor – it's a driver of transformation, from Africa's green minerals and smart cities to Asia's manufacturing prowess and Latin America's clean energy revolution.

In many ways, the magazine itself is a reflection of this interconnected, globalised world. Our editorial, creative and sales teams span cities and continents – from London to Cape Town and Johannesburg – collaborating across borders to bring these stories to life. That, in essence, is what this publication stands for: partnership, perspective, and a shared vision for the future.

This issue explores how collaboration and creativity are reshaping the global order. We begin with reflections on the shared future of BRICS nations, followed by features on inclusive development in Africa, digital and skills transformation, and food security in the Global South. Our deep dive into artificial intelligence and cybersecurity examines how emerging technologies can empower rather than exclude. We also turn our attention to the evolving G20-BRICS dynamic, prospects for a BRICS currency, and the role of the New Development Bank in creating a truly multipolar financial system.

Beyond policy, this magazine is about people – innovators, thinkers, and young leaders who are redefining what it means to build from the South and for the South. You'll find interviews and insights from voices leading this change, including a feature on developing the next generation of African leaders.

A special thank you to the BRICS+ Consulting Group – Cole Jackson, Chloé Maluleke, and Sesona Mdlokovana – for their tireless work and creativity in bringing this publication to life. I often joke that the "+" in BRICS+ represents the many hats they wear, which now officially includes producing a magazine. Their commitment, energy, and belief in the power of collective storytelling have made this possible.

BRICS & The Global South is more than a publication – it's a platform for ideas that matter, and for connections that move us toward a fairer, more balanced world.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. The future is multipolar, and it starts here.

Saarah Survé,
Editor-in-Chief

BRICS, G20 & THE GLOBAL SOUTH

FORGING A PATH TO A SHARED HUMANITY

Cole Jackson with Chloé Maluleke and Sesona Mdlokovana,
Lead Associate and Associates, BRICS+ Consulting Group

In a time of global uncertainty, the call for a fairer world order has never been louder. Traditional systems of cooperation remain dominated by a minority of industrialised nations. The BRICS alliance, G20, and the rise of the Global South could reshape that narrative. Together, they represent a shift toward a multipolar world grounded in shared humanity, dignity, and inclusive development.

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BRICS

BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) was established in 2009, with the explicit aim of reforming global governance and encouraging economic cooperation among emerging powers. Its foundational ethos is one of equality and mutual respect, a stark contrast to the weighted voting systems of traditional institutions, like the UN Security Council. South Africa joined in 2010. The organisation continues to expand, now consisting of 10 official member states.

By ensuring all member states have equal decision-making authority, regardless of economic size, BRICS models a form of partnership built on solidarity rather than subordination.

The creation of the New Development Bank (NDB) in July 2015 is a tangible manifestation of this principle, offering an equitable alternative to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for development financing. While the bloc faces challenges in coordinating its diverse economies and navigating a dollar-dominated system, its very existence and continued expansion signal a decisive move towards a world where a plurality of voices can shape their own destinies through collective progress in trade, technology, and social development.

To foster a more equitable global financial system, BRICS is encouraging bilateral trade in members' national currencies. Concurrently, the bloc is holding preliminary conversations about implementing a shared BRICS currency, a project still in its early stages.

Group of 20 (G20)

The G20, representing close to 85% of global GDP and 75% of international trade, holds immense structural power to reshape global governance. Its greatest test today, however, lies not in finance, but in fairness. For decades, its policy decisions have disproportionately reflected the priorities of industrialised nations, often treating the Global South as a junior partner. This imbalance is no longer sustainable.

A reformed G20, one that genuinely amplifies voices from the South and integrates social and environmental justice into its core economic agenda, could become the moral bridge between global influence and global inclusion. By building consensus beyond mere GDP metrics and prioritising coordinated action on debt and climate finance, the G20 can demonstrate that shared humanity begins with shared power. It stands at a crossroads: to reform and become a truly representative forum, or risk irrelevance in a world that is no longer waiting for an invitation to the table.

The Global South

The Global South is not a monolith but a diverse collective at a crucial historical moment. It is increasingly promoting a vision for global governance that prioritises shared humanity over existing hierarchies. With over 85% of the world's youth, abundant resources, and rapid technological advancements, it possesses immense potential for sustainable development.

Increased South-South cooperation and innovative financing demonstrate a move towards greater independence. However, persistent obstacles – crippling debt, the existential threat of climate change, and the digital divide – require a unified response. The dual challenge for the Global South is to harness its collective economic and demographic power while simultaneously advocating for the democratisation of financial, trade, and technological systems on the global stage.

The intertwined paths of BRICS, the G20, and the Global South are shaping a new global vision. BRICS demonstrates cooperative governance; a reformed G20 integrates it into the global economy; and the Global South provides the demographic, economic, and moral drive for change. Together, they have the potential to shift the world from a hegemonic order to one of dignified interdependence, building a truly representative and accountable multilateral system for all humanity.

G20 DELEGATES VISIT STATE-OF-THE-ART ASTRONOMY FACILITY IN THE KAROO

As South Africa celebrated Heritage Day on 24 September 2024, the nation's rich cultural heritage was complemented by a showcase of its scientific excellence when G20 delegates from over 30 countries gathered in the Northern Cape for a glimpse of the world's most sensitive radio telescope ever built, the MeerKAT and the Square Kilometre Array-Mid telescope. The tour to the site was a collaboration between the Department of Science, Technology and Innovation (DSTI) and the SKA Observatory (SKAO). The visit underscored the power of research to transform communities and South Africa's growing leadership in frontier science.

DSTI Director-a, Dr Mlungisi Cele, delivered the keynote on behalf of Minister Blade Nzimande, reminding guests that Africa is both the cradle of humanity and a rising force in global knowledge production.

"The SKA is more than a scientific endeavour, it's a driver for socio economic transformation, and a catalyst for developing the next generation of scientists, innovators, and engineers."

Through sustained government investment, the project has created more than 8 800 jobs in the region, channeled millions of rands into small local businesses, and trained over 300 artisans in Carnarvon. Ninety percent of the staff in the Northern Cape facilities are drawn from surrounding communities to ensure that world-class science leaves a tangible local footprint. "This is not just about telescopes," Dr Cele said. "It is about human potential."

Astronomy has long been a strategic priority for South Africa, deployed as a tool of science diplomacy and innovation. MeerKAT, already among the most powerful radio telescopes in the world and the world's most sensitive radio telescope, has produced more than 500 scientific publications. Its successor, SKA-Mid, is now under construction and promises to expand the country's role in probing cosmic origins.

Yet, as Dr Cele stressed, the ambition extends beyond discovery. The project continues to support the next generation of scientists and innovators through investments in education, including more than 1 700 bursaries with a 90% graduation rate, robotics programmes for schools, and early childhood development initiatives. Astro-tourism is being cultivated through a new visitor centre that links science to sustainable local enterprise.

Ultimately, science should remain grounded so that it can drive impact in communities. Prof. Jessica Dempsey, Director of the Netherlands Institute for Radio Astronomy, described the SKA as "probably the most diverse global experiment" ever attempted, not only in its science but in its model of cooperation.

This SKAO is a global enterprise that brings together countries from five continents, including Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the UK. Their roles span financing, operations, engineering, design and computing capacity, as well as infrastructure and science leadership. Together, these nations pool resources and innovation to drive breakthroughs in astronomy and technology while strengthening local and international capacity.

"Science is one of the last universal bridges we all share," said Prof. Dempsey, emphasising how collaboration across borders allows nations to pool wisdom and extend opportunities to young researchers worldwide. For Prof. Dempsey, the project's true return on investment is seen in the small and medium businesses exposed to cutting-edge technology, in young women inspired to pursue science, and in the commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion that ensures communities see themselves reflected in leadership. "If we close the gender gap in science," she said, "we would inject $5 trillion dollars into G20 GDP by 2030."

Local impact remains central. Dr Lindsay Magnus, Director of SKA-Mid, reflected on the responsibility to "be generators of information" rather than mere consumers. "South Africa must be an active player in the global technological and innovation landscape," he said. Dr Magnus believes the project's success will be measured as much in social legacy as in scientific breakthroughs.

"We intend to be in this community for the next 50 years," he said, highlighting ongoing support for schools and early development programmes. Plans are in place to expand the project and stretch operations far into the future. Dr Magnus emphasised that the project must continually uplift the communities hosting it.

OUR SHARED FUTURE

A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON BRICS AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Dr Iqbal Survé, Patron and Founder, Survé Family Offices and Survé Philanthropies

Over the last two decades, we have entered a profoundly different period in global history, the era of a multipolar world. The emergence of the BRICS grouping, which represents around 40% of the world's population and GDP, is significant because, for the first time, it offers people from the Global South a genuine opportunity to benefit from the growing wealth of the world.

I have never seen BRICS as being opposed to the West. On the contrary, for many years, BRICS has supported globalisation. Remembering Thomas Friedman's ***The World Is Flat***, the sharing of information, resources, knowledge, and technology has the potential to create immense wealth for the entire world. This is the promise of BRICS and of a multipolar world.

The BRICS Heads of State Summit

One of the singular privileges of my participation, whether through the BRICS Business Forum, the BRICS Business Council, the BRICS Media Forum, or meetings with heads of state, has been the immense honour of engaging directly with the leaders of the BRICS countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Each of these engagements was unique yet equally important, contributing meaningfully to the development of South Africa and the broader Global South.

I had the privilege of delivering keynote speeches to the heads of state, including Xi Jinping, Vladimir Putin, Narendra Modi, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Dilma Rousseff, Cyril Ramaphosa and Jacob Zuma. In these addresses, I emphasised the importance of working together, strengthening cooperation, developing integrated payment systems, and supporting the establishment of the New Development Bank. I also advocated for the creation of working groups across multiple sectors, from sustainability to climate change.

Most importantly, I called for greater unity between BRICS nations and those from the Northern Hemisphere to engage actively in shared humanity, growth, and peace despite political or cultural differences.

In my private discussions with these leaders, I was struck by their insight and sincerity. President Xi reaffirmed China's deep commitment to Africa's development and shared how his country overcame poverty by uplifting more than 800 million people through structured planning. Prime Minister Modi spoke warmly of the historic ties between South Africa and India, rooted in the liberation struggle. President Putin reiterated Russia's enduring commitment to Africa's development and long-standing solidarity with the ANC. President Lula and Former President Dilma Rousseff expressed Brazil's solidarity with the Global South and its admiration for South Africa's goodwill and leadership.

The expansion of BRICS to include other countries from Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and South America has been deeply gratifying. This was an idea long discussed in our earlier council meetings and brought to life through invitations extended to neighbouring countries during BRICS summits in South Africa in 2013, 2018, and 2023. Today, the BRICS family, now including nations such as Egypt, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, represents an even more powerful and inclusive coalition.

The BRICS Business Council and Business Forums

The BRICS Business Council, composed of 24 council members and supported by over 2,000 committee representatives, is a unique platform for building a multipolar world through business collaboration. As a founding member and Chair of the South African Chapter, I had the privilege of working alongside the co-chairs and their respective business leaders.

The council meetings were held in major capitals such as Beijing, Moscow, and New Delhi. They brought together private companies and state enterprises, strengthening relationships across sectors. Each council was appointed by its respective government, and its recommendations were presented directly to heads of state and ministers, reflecting the council's seniority and strategic importance.

The BRICS Business Forum became a dynamic space for dialogue between business and government, a "who's who" of the Global South. Hosting the forum in Johannesburg and Durban was an honour, allowing South African business communities, city mayors, and regional leaders to engage directly with global partners. These gatherings advanced people-to-people business exchanges and built practical cooperation across industries.

The New Development Bank

The BRICS Business Council, working alongside the heads of state and finance ministers, helped plant the seeds of what would become the New Development Bank (NDB). This was a milestone achievement designed to facilitate investment and economic growth across BRICS countries and beyond.

I was proud to be part of the early discussions that envisioned an independent BRICS bank, not as a rival to other multilateral institutions but as a complement, ensuring that capital could be channelled effectively to the Global South. The NDB today serves nearly half of the world's population, financing sustainable infrastructure, digital inclusion, and energy transformation.

In my capacity as Chairman of the BRICS Business Council, I engaged closely with the NDB's leadership and hosted several of its conferences in South Africa. These discussions deepened the potential for accelerating payment systems, fintech development, and financial inclusion. Yet, I have also acknowledged that South Africa's public and private sectors have not yet fully capitalised on the NDB's opportunities, particularly in infrastructure development such as rail, harbours, and transport logistics.

BRICS Media Forum, Belt and Road News Network

As the Chairman and owner of one of Africa's largest media organisations, I was honoured to serve as Co-Chair of the BRICS Media Forum alongside the President and Chairman of Xinhua and People's Daily News Agencies. Hosting these forums in South Africa on several occasions was a privilege, as they strengthened media cooperation and mutual understanding among BRICS nations.

Additionally, I was delighted to serve on the Belt and Road News Network, helping to foster partnerships in global communication and media collaboration. These engagements underscored the importance of telling our own stories, ensuring that the voices of the Global South are heard in the global narrative.

The Global South and the need for shared humanity

The post–World War II period saw immense economic growth in the West, unprecedented prosperity for some, but not for all. While the Global South made economic strides, the benefits of that growth often failed to reach its people. The emergence of BRICS has accelerated economic inclusion and cooperation across regions.

This can only be a positive force for a shared humanity. For the first time in modern history, the world has the opportunity to eradicate poverty, reduce inequality, and ensure that all people can live with dignity. This is the ultimate promise of BRICS and of an integrated Global South within the global community of nations.

BARRIERS TO INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

Prof. Elizabeth Nanziri
Associate Professor of Development Finance & Economic Policy, Stellenbosch Business School

Africa's skyline is rising. Cities are buzzing, highways stretching, and GDP graphs pointing upward. Yet, beneath this surface of progress lies a quieter truth — millions of Africans are still waiting for that growth to touch their lives. The continent's economic story over the past two decades has been impressive on paper, but painfully uneven in practice.

Inclusive development, simply put, is about ensuring that prosperity doesn't stay trapped in boardrooms and capital cities. It's about making sure opportunity trickles down to the farmer in Kisumu, the entrepreneur in Lagos, and the young graduate in Johannesburg. It's growth with fairness, participation, and dignity.

Growth without inclusion

Between 2000 and 2019, Africa's economies grew at an average of 4.5% a year. But that statistic hides a starker one: more than 400 million Africans still live on less than $1.90 a day. It's like watching a tree grow tall but bear too little fruit — something fundamental isn't translating between expansion and impact.

Money that doesn't reach the people

The first barrier is financial. For most small businesses, especially those owned by women or based in rural towns, accessing credit feels like chasing the wind. Banks remain risk-averse, interest rates high, and collateral requirements impossible. Studies have shown women entrepreneurs in Africa are the least likely to receive funding, not for lack of ambition, but because the system isn't built for them.

Microfinance and mobile banking have begun to close the gap, bringing financial services into places where bank branches have never existed. But financial literacy remains low, and many still borrow in desperation, not for development. Until the financial system learns to serve the margins, not just the middle, inclusion will remain a slogan.

Institutions that leak trust

The second barrier is institutional. Weak governance, corruption, and bureaucratic inefficiency eat away at public trust. Development funds too often disappear into the fog of mismanagement before they ever build a school or clinic. Transparency International has long warned that corruption across parts of Africa continues to bleed development dry — not only of money, but of hope.

To make growth inclusive, governments must rebuild trust from the ground up: transparent systems, strong oversight, and leadership that serves rather than rules.

Politics that divide rather than unite

The third barrier is social and political. Across Africa, ethnic divisions, patronage, and political instability continue to fracture development. When opportunity depends on proximity to power rather than merit, whole communities are left behind. True inclusion requires governance that gives everyone — women, minorities, the poor — a seat at the table.

Learning from Africa's own contrasts

South Africa, despite being one of the continent's economic giants, remains one of its most unequal nations. The wealth gap is cavernous, and unemployment, especially among youth, feels like a ticking bomb. The promise of post-apartheid inclusion still struggles against structural inequality that's decades deep.

Then there's Rwanda — a story of what's possible. Rising from the ashes of 1994, the country has built one of Africa's most stable and socially cohesive economies. Through community-driven initiatives like Umuganda, citizens rebuild together, both literally and symbolically. With women occupying over 60% of parliamentary seats, policy in Rwanda reflects a wider range of voices — and it shows in the results.

Lessons from beyond Africa

Brazil's Bolsa Família programme offers another glimpse of inclusion at work: direct cash transfers tied to education and health check-ups lifted millions out of poverty. Germany's model, meanwhile, shows how strong vocational training and universal healthcare keep citizens integrated into both economy and society.

Both examples remind us that inclusion isn't charity — it's strategy. It strengthens economies, stabilises societies, and sustains growth.

A new kind of progress

Africa's challenge is not just to grow, but to grow together. That means designing policies that lift those at the bottom, nurturing community-based initiatives, and investing in the people who hold the continent's future — its youth and women.

Inclusive development isn't a finish line; it's a mindset. It asks every policymaker, every business leader, every citizen: Who gets left behind when we move forward?

Because true progress isn't measured by GDP alone, but by how evenly its light falls across the map of our shared continent.

I N
E Q U A L I T Y

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FORGING A NEW PATH

HOW BRICS+ INITIATIVES ARE BUILDING A MORE INCLUSIVE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Charli Sitong Zhang, Founder and President of the Coalition for Global Health Innovation, SABYA member

For decades, the architecture of global development has been dominated by a Western-led consensus. Institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the OECD have established the terms of engagement, designing a system intended to promote growth and stability. Yet, for vast swathes of the Global South, the track record of this system reveals not triumph, but persistent structural failure. The limitations of this old model have spurred a search for alternatives, and the expansion of the BRICS+ bloc represents the most significant institutional response to this demand. It is evolving from a political dialogue forum into a platform actively operationalising a different development philosophy – one built not on abstract ideals but on a growing portfolio of specific initiatives aimed at achieving more equitable and sovereign growth.

The failures of the traditional model are threefold. First, the architecture of global finance is fundamentally exclusionary. Voting power in institutions like the IMF and World Bank remains a privilege of wealth, not a right of representation. This entrenches a democratic deficit at the heart of global governance, leaving emerging economies with minimal influence over the very policies that dictate their economic fate. Second, the lifeline of development finance comes with paralysing strings attached. Loans from traditional lenders are often conditioned on austerity measures, privatisation, and trade liberalisation. These prescriptions often undermine national sovereignty, force cuts to vital public services, and exacerbate inequality — prioritising debt repayment over human dignity. Third, the model itself prioritises abstract metrics over tangible human outcomes. Development projects are often export-oriented and infrastructure-heavy, designed for efficiency on a spreadsheet rather than resilience in a community. This approach, coupled with fragmented and volatile aid flows, makes long-term, locally-owned planning nearly impossible.

To assess the credibility of the BRICS+ alternative, one must move beyond summit declarations and examine the machinery on the ground. Its approach to inclusive development is being advanced through two primary, interconnected channels: targeted project financing and a broader ecosystem deliberately designed to enhance economic sovereignty.

The project-first mandate: The NDB in action

The most tangible instrument of the BRICS+ vision is the New Development Bank (NDB). Conceived as a direct counterpoint to traditional multilateral banks, its operational mandate focuses squarely on funding sustainable infrastructure projects that address foundational bottlenecks to economic participation. A review of its portfolio, particularly in Africa, reveals a strategic emphasis on energy, water, and transport –sectors that are the bedrock of broad-based growth.

This project-based approach is not theoretical; it is visible in concrete initiatives across the continent. South Africa's just energy transition, supported by a $480 million NDB loan for renewable energy generation and grid infrastructure, directly addresses the country's severe "load-shedding" crisis, which has crippled small businesses and compromised public services. By focusing on energy stability – a fundamental prerequisite for any economic activity – the project strengthens the grassroots economy and provides a tangible foundation for inclusive growth.

The Lesotho Highlands Water Project Phase II, backed by a $150 million loan to co-finance the Polihali Dam, exemplifies a model of regional development structured for mutual benefit. It provides Lesotho with vital royalties and hydropower while securing a critical water supply for South Africa's industrial heartland, moving beyond extractive paradigms toward integrated, shared prosperity.

Similarly, Egypt's solar power generation initiative, involving a $500 million loan for the 500 MW Kom Ombo solar plant – one of the largest private-sector utility-scale solar plants in the country – supports Egypt's national goal of sourcing 42% of its energy from renewables by 2030. By adding substantial clean capacity to the national grid, it helps meet the growing energy demands of both industry and households, contributing to price stability and expanding access – a key element of long-term, inclusive economic planning.

Beyond individual projects, the NDB's strategic engagement signals a deeper alignment with continental ambitions. Its potential role in financing transformative regional corridors, such as Kenya's LAPSSET project or the Abidjan-Lagos Highway, is pivotal for the success of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). By facilitating the movement of goods and services, such investments stimulate intra-African trade and create cross-border economic opportunities that are the lifeblood of endogenous development.

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Beyond financing: Building an ecosystem of sovereignty

While the NDB builds physical infrastructure, other BRICS+ initiatives focus on creating the financial and political conditions for long-term, self-determined development. This broader ecosystem is crucial for ensuring that the gains from individual projects are not erased by volatile global systems.

The concerted push for bilateral trade in local currencies and the New Development Bank's issuance of bonds in currencies like the South African Rand aim to dismantle dependency on the US dollar. This provides member countries with a crucial shield against volatile currency swings and enhances their monetary policy autonomy. The result is the ability to craft economic strategies more tailored to domestic needs—such as protecting social spending—rather than being beholden to external financial pressures and the monetary policy of the US Federal Reserve.

The Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), a $100 billion pool of foreign exchange reserves, offers a vital alternative to the IMF for members facing short-term balance-of-payments pressures. By providing emergency liquidity with fewer political conditionalities, the CRA helps preserve a nation's fiscal space to maintain public investment in health, education, and social safety nets during economic downturns. This directly protects vulnerable populations from the brunt of economic shocks, a core tenet of inclusive development.

Perhaps the most profound departure from the traditional donor-recipient script is the explicit recognition and commitment to support the AfCFTA and the African Union's Agenda 2063 in official BRICS declarations. This approach positions BRICS+ as an enabler of Africa's own development blueprint, contrasting starkly with models that impose external visions. In practice, this translates into the NDB financing the cross-border infrastructure essential for the AfCFTA's success, thereby fostering a genuinely African-led industrialisation where the benefits of trade and value addition are retained within the continent.

The road ahead: Navigating the inevitable challenges

For all its promise, the BRICS+ compact is not a guaranteed success. The path to a more inclusive global order is fraught with challenges that the bloc must navigate with wisdom and resolve.

Internally, the harmonious expansion that brought in diverse new members like Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE is a double-edged sword. While it amplifies the bloc's collective voice, it also introduces complex, often conflicting, geopolitical interests.BRICS+ must prove it can forge a coherent and principled Africa strategy that is not derailed by the bilateral disputes of its members.

Operationally, the NDB must scale its impact. Africa's infrastructure needs are colossal, and the bank's project pipeline, while promising, must accelerate its pace of disbursement without compromising its commendable environmental and social safeguards. Bureaucratic inertia cannot be allowed to stifle the urgency of development.

Most critically, the bloc must ensure that African agency remains the non-negotiable core of its initiatives. The promise of inclusivity is hollow if projects are conceived in distant capitals and simply imposed upon African nations. The true test will be whether projects are genuinely demand-driven, aligned with the African Union's Agenda 2063, and implemented with significant input from local contractors, engineers, and communities. The benefits of development must be retained on the continent, building local capacity and expertise.

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A partnership of potential, grounded in action

The BRICS+ model for fostering development is demonstrating its operational reality. It is visible in the NDB's growing portfolio of energy and infrastructure projects, the financial resilience offered by the CRA, and the strategic autonomy pursued through local currency initiatives. Most distinctly, it is embodied in the political commitment to align with continental agendas like the AfCFTA.

The BRICS+ offer to the Global South is fundamentally different. It is a compact built on a shared identity as emerging powers and a stated commitment to mutual benefit. While the old model demanded that nations of the Global South integrate into a system they did not design, BRICS+ is, in both theory and increasingly in practice, offering the tools to build their own. By financing the foundational infrastructure that unlocks economic potential, promoting financial sovereignty that enhances policy space, and aligning strategically with homegrown initiatives, BRICS+ is laying the groundwork for a more balanced partnership.

The initiatives are specific, operational, and pointed in a new direction. The promise is no longer just a seat at the high table of global governance, but the capacity and resources to build a table of one's own. The compact is still young, and its ultimate success is not preordained. But for the first time in a generation, there is a credible, well-funded, and structurally alternative vision for global development – and it speaks the language of inclusivity not as a distant aspiration, but as a tangible mandate. The evidence is on the ground, and it is finally starting to speak for itself.

TOWARDS INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM

Mamonare Magdeline Malapane, Senior Researcher, South African BRICS Youth Association

South Africa's G20 presidency in a challenging global context

As the G20 president, South Africa stands at a defining moment, ready to shape global dialogues and policies. This is because its presidency occurs while the global community is confronted with climate change, underdevelopment, inequality, poverty, hunger, unemployment, technological advancements, and geopolitical instability, as alluded to by the President of South Africa. During the launch of the Special Edition of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Progress Report on 25 April 2023, the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, expressed his concern that merely 12% of the SDG targets are presently on course, with around 50% requiring more significant advancement, and over 30% of the SDGs having either stagnated or regressed.

The outlook for global economic growth remains subdued, and many economies carry the burden of unsustainable levels of debt. This thus put pressure on SA to use its G20 presidency to promote a paradigm shift and hasten the implementation of practical solutions. Part of the paradigm shift requires the G20 countries to situate inequities at the centre of economic policymaking. This necessitates a call to action towards inclusive development and institutional reform.

Inclusive development in the G20 is a broad agenda focused on ensuring that economic growth benefits all segments of society, particularly the most vulnerable, by addressing inequalities in income, opportunity, and welfare. A move towards inclusive development, rightly put, includes promoting inclusive business models, strengthening social protection, advancing gender equality, and fostering sustainable and equitable development through policy and collaborative action across public and private sectors. It speaks of advancing institutional reforms that include efforts to close the gender pay gap, increase women's representation in leadership, expand access to finance for women entrepreneurs, and require gender-disaggregated data in budgets.

Advancing inclusive development and institutional reform

Inclusive development within the G20 is driven by plans to create more equitable global systems through initiatives like the Global Public Investment (GPI) framework and the Inclusive Business Framework. These plans aim to address global inequalities, support sustainable development and empower marginalised groups through specific policies on finance, education, and social protection. The G20 is pursuing inclusive development through institutional reforms aimed at addressing inequality and promoting sustainable development, with a special emphasis on youth and gender empowerment, social protection, and infrastructure development. Key institutional reforms include reforming fiscal frameworks to support long-term investment, enhancing the role of private finance and making multilateral institutions inclusive and more representative.

Driving global change and sustainable progress

The country's G20 presidency brings about a strategic opportunity to enact significant global change, calling for action towards inclusive and just development while promoting institutional reforms. By leveraging diverse global perspectives and regional insights, SA is uniquely positioned to advocate for policies that tackle immediate challenges while also forging paths towards sustainable and inclusive development.

The G20's significance in laying the groundwork for global economic stability, serving as a vital catalyst for economic development, and carrying out major global pledges such as the Pact for the Future and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Progress cannot be overstated. It is expected that South Africa will take advantage of its G20 presidency to adopt global best practices for inclusive economic recovery, climate change resilience, and health system strengthening. This will be realised by drawing inspiration from Indonesia, India, Brazil, and insights from the United Nations Summit of the Future.

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RETHINKING GLOBAL GOVERNANCE
FRAGMENTATION, REFORM, AND AFRICA'S RISING ROLE

**Amb Anil Sooklal, High Commissioner of South Africa to India,
and Dr Samir Bhattacharya, Associate Fellow at Observer Research Foundation**

As we approach the end of 2025, the world is more fractured than it has been in decades. The global governance architecture, rooted in post-World War structures, is increasingly out of sync with contemporary political, economic, and demographic realities. The very institutions created to preserve peace, facilitate cooperation, and promote development are now viewed as outdated, unrepresentative, and often ineffective.

While Samuel Huntington's "clash of civilisations" continues to echo, today's global divisions are far more layered. Instead of a simple East vs. West binary, the world today faces a complex multipolar environment, divided by divergent political systems, economic interests, technological development, and environmental vulnerabilities. As a result, global governance is not only contested in values but also in its structure, authority and legitimacy.

The crumbling foundations of global governance

The winners of World War II laid the foundations of current global governance. Institutions like the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) were created to shape a stable and rules-based international order, reflecting the realities of the post-World War II era. While these organisations managed to keep the world relatively peaceful for 80-odd years, it is increasingly failing to do so. One particular reason behind its failure is its outdated structure, where a handful of powerful states decide for the entire planet.

Indeed, the UN Security Council, the central body for maintaining international peace and security, still reflects the power dynamics of 1945. The veto-wielding permanent members (P5), the US, UK, France, Russia, and China, frequently paralyse the Council when their interests clash. From the war in Palestine, Syria, Ukraine, Myanmar, Sudan and elsewhere, the UN has failed to prevent it. Instead of serving as a guardian of peace, the UN is often seen as a stage for geopolitical posturing.

The problem isn't only about inaction. It's also about representation. Paradoxically, while over half of the Security Council's agenda concerns African conflicts, no African nation holds a permanent seat. Despite widespread support for the Ezulwini Consensus, Africa's official position since 2005, calling for greater representation, the continent remains excluded from top decision-making roles. The same imbalance persists at the IMF and World Bank, where voting power remains skewed in favour of wealthy nations, even as developing countries face the brunt of debt, climate, and health crises.

The multipolar moment and its contradictions

The emergence of BRICS+ and various other minilateral organisations can be attributed to the perceived shortcomings of the UN-led multilateral system. This development calls into question the effectiveness, relevance, and representativeness of existing international frameworks. However, this shift toward a multipolar world brings both promise and peril. On one hand, new formations like BRICS+ offer alternative platforms for countries of the Global South seeking more autonomy in global affairs. On the other hand, these platforms often operate in silos and lack the institutional strength of traditional multilateral systems.

Meanwhile, akin to the bipolar world of the Cold War era, the world is again witnessing two competing models of governance: the US-led market-driven framework versus China's state-led development model. Europe, caught between caution and dependency, leans toward the former while hedging risks. In between lies the Global South, a diverse set of nations navigating between these powers while scrambling to establish their own governance paths.

This fragmentation produces what scholars call epistemic dissonance, deep structural disagreements over policy as well as the fundamental nature of what governance should look like. The challenge is no longer just bias or underrepresentation; it's the imposition of a Eurocentric governance model, with systemic exclusion of diverse worldviews.

Towards a new model of global governance

The failures of current institutions go beyond exclusion. Many multilateral frameworks were created under the assumption of Western primacy and homogeneity. They do not reflect the plural, multilingual, culturally diverse realities of the 21st century.

A reimagined governance model for Africa must go beyond simply adding new voices to existing systems. It must recognise the continent's rich diversity, value indigenous knowledge, and respect the right of African nations to define their own development paths. Too often, Africa's complexity is ignored in externally imposed governance frameworks. What is needed is not a shift in dominance, but the creation of flexible, decentralised, and fair systems that distribute power more equitably and reflect the realities on the ground.

The 2023 accession of the AU to permanent membership of the G20 was a crucial breakthrough. Finally, Africa is represented as a bloc in the premier forum for economic cooperation, alongside the European Union (EU). This moment reflects a growing consensus that the continent can no longer be sidelined. It also coincides with more African nationals taking leadership positions in key global institutions, such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO), World Health Organisation (WHO) and most recently the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

The G20 Leaders' Summit in November – the first on the African continent – will occur in the context of deep frustration over the continued exclusion of African perspectives. It is a historic opportunity to showcase African priorities: restructuring unsustainable debt, charting a way to reduce the climate finance gap for developing countries by 2035, and embedding the African Continental Free Trade Area in global trade frameworks.

From symbolism to substance

The world stands at a governance crossroads. Traditional institutions are losing relevance, while emerging powers are asserting themselves. In these changing realities, the future of global governance will not be decided by reform alone. It will be shaped by those who build new systems from the ground up — systems that are fairer, more inclusive, and better suited to the entire world, not just the interests of a few historically powerful countries.

Thankfully, South Africa's G20 offers that rare window of opportunity. Africa is more visible than ever in global governance, its demographic and economic importance are growing, and major powers, including the US, EU, China, Russia and Gulf States, are competing for its partnership. However, Africa must move beyond being a passive arena for global competition, as it was during the Cold War. Instead, it should use this renewed visibility to influence global norms and shape outcomes on its own terms. South Africa's G20 Presidency is a critical platform to champion this shift, from symbolic inclusion to meaningful influence in decision-making.

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REIMAGINING UBUNTU IN A CONNECTED WORLD

South Africa faces a pivotal moment: bridging the tech divide with inclusive, future-focused solutions

Theolin Thembo, Multimedia Journalist, IOL

South Africa's G20 presidency comes at a time of intersecting global crises – climate change, inequality, geopolitical instability and rapid technological transformation.

With the theme "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability" and the philosophy of Ubuntu at its core, the country has the opportunity to shape a digital future that's inclusive, ethical, and locally grounded.

"Countries that attempt to prosper alone amid widespread poverty and underdevelopment contradict the essence of Ubuntu and our collective humanity," reads the G20 presidency's official message.

Global lessons

The digital divide is no longer just about who's online – but who can meaningfully participate in the digital economy.

Dr Jonathan Shock, associate professor at UCT's Department of Mathematics and Applied Mathematics, highlights models from around the world that offer insight. Estonia's secure national platforms, Singapore's industry-academia training programmes, and India's rapid rollout of digital IDs have driven inclusive economic growth.

"But while we can learn from others, South Africa must build for its own reality," says Shock. "We need to invest in local infrastructure, local talent, and our own digital sovereignty."

AI and digital tools, he says, offer enormous entrepreneurial potential – but without access to training, those possibilities will remain out of reach for many.

Measuring real access

Rowen Pillai, CEO of LeanTechnovations, argues that quality of access matters more than simple connectivity.

"Across the G20, even rural areas in developed countries struggle with speed and reliability. In emerging economies like ours, the barrier is affordability," he explains.

"We need to move from counting towers to measuring outcomes – latency, speed, safety, and cost – at a district level."

Pillai advocates for modernised Universal Service Funds, outcome-based tenders, and smarter infrastructure planning to ensure that connectivity is meaningful and scalable.

A dual-track future

To build resilience, Pillai suggests a two-pronged strategy: align with global governance standards like the EU AI Act and the NIST AI Risk Framework, while simultaneously building local capabilities.

This includes investing in green data centres, affordable compute, and practical AI skills in key sectors like health, mining, and agriculture.

He also stresses transparency in power and water use, ensuring that AI-era infrastructure doesn't deepen other resource divides.

A digital economy

For South Africa, this moment is not just about catching up – but about leading differently. A digital economy anchored in Ubuntu means putting people first, protecting their data, and expanding opportunity.

As the country steps onto the global stage, the challenge – and opportunity – is clear: to harness global momentum while building a connected, equitable digital future that reflects who we are.

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REWIRING THE STATE

BUILDING INSTITUTIONS FOR A MULTIPOLAR AGE

Gillian Schutte, writer and filmmaker

"Institutions make or break nations." In a world increasingly defined by polycentric power, disruptive technology, and post-pandemic uncertainty, this statement is more than a platitude – it is a warning. Across the Global South, the modern state faces a paradox. It wields vast symbolic power, yet remains paralysed by outdated bureaucratic machinery, fragmented governance ecosystems, and increasingly restive citizenries. If emerging powers are to stake their claim in the multipolar world order, institutional reform is not optional – it is existential.

The case for urgent reform

Post-pandemic governance fatigue has exposed a critical vulnerability: many state institutions were designed for a different era, and their rigidity has become an obstacle to resilience. From public health delivery to energy regulation, from service delivery to disaster preparedness, the post-2020 world has made it clear that agility, coherence, and accountability are no longer aspirational ideals – they are prerequisites for legitimacy.

This urgency is especially pronounced in the Global South, where institutions are grappling with compounded crises: climate change, digital transition, rising debt burdens, and geopolitical polarisation. States must now navigate a landscape in which supply chains are weaponised, big data shapes voter sentiment, and environmental risks undermine national sovereignty. Yet too many institutions – built on colonial or donor-era models – lack the architecture, resources, and mandate to operate effectively in this context.

South Africa's ongoing efforts at public sector digitalisation provide one instructive example. While frameworks exist for e-governance and smart systems, the lack of coordinated digital infrastructure and capacity-building has undermined implementation. India's "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance" initiative signals a similar attempt to reconfigure the state's presence – less as an intrusive bureaucracy and more as a platform for coordinated policy action. Both models, despite challenges, reflect a growing recognition that institutional reinvention is now imperative.

Legacy systems vs future demands

The heart of the challenge lies in the mismatch between 20th-century governance models and 21st-century complexity. Legacy bureaucracies are structured for vertical, rule-bound operations – unsuited to the networked, fast-moving demands of the digital age. Artificial intelligence, decentralised finance, cybersecurity, and transnational regulatory challenges require institutions that can anticipate change, coordinate horizontally, and learn in real time.

Yet reforms are consistently met with resistance. In Kenya, for example, attempts to overhaul public procurement systems have faced institutional inertia, elite capture, and political sabotage – despite the introduction of digital platforms to curb corruption. In Nigeria, the bureaucratic reform agenda, although ambitious, is often stalled by a lack of inter-agency coherence and fragmented accountability mechanisms. The lesson is clear: without political will and citizen engagement, reform remains surface-deep.

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Charting the reform agenda

To rewire the state, the reform agenda must prioritise four interlocking imperatives:

Governance agility

Institutions must become adaptive. This means designing policy labs within ministries, piloting iterative reforms, and embedding feedback loops that make government a learning organism. Rwanda Development Board (RDB) is a case in point – an integrated institution that coordinates investment, innovation, and regulation under a unified framework.

Digital transformation

The era of e-governance is no longer futuristic – it is overdue. Blockchain technologies, interoperable data systems, and AI-enhanced decision-making must become part of the institutional DNA. But digitalisation must be grounded in sovereignty, with public control over data infrastructures and safeguards against digital colonialism.

Accountability and civic trust

Reforms will flounder without mechanisms to rebuild public trust. Oversight bodies – anti-corruption commissions, ombudsman offices, judicial reform boards – must be independent, capacitated, and transparent. Equally vital is expanding participatory platforms, from citizen audits to digital consultations, which allow the public to co-shape governance.

Regional and global alignment

Institutional reform must align with the realities of regional integration. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), for instance, demands harmonisation of customs, legal, and fiscal institutions. BRICS+ frameworks similarly necessitate interoperable standards, regulatory cooperation, and policy synchronisation across borders.

Singapore's civil service, long hailed for its results-oriented governance, offers another model. It recruits top talent, rotates leadership roles, and ties performance to citizen outcomes. While its context is unique, its ethos – of responsive, future-facing statecraft – is instructive.

A different but equally revealing model can be seen in Russia. After years of neoliberal devastation, Russia has rebuilt its institutional sovereignty through deliberate re-industrialisation and state-led coordination. Facing Western sanctions, it reinvested in domestic production, scientific education, and technological self-reliance. Institutions like Rosatom demonstrate how the state can integrate science, governance, and long-term planning to defend national autonomy. Where Singapore perfects efficiency, Russia reclaims independence – and both approaches show that institutional design is ultimately a political choice about whose interests the state serves.

> "Institutions should not just enforce rules – they should learn."

Reform is political, not just technical

The gravest mistake reformers can make is to treat institutional redesign as a technocratic exercise. Reform is inherently political. It disrupts entrenched interests, rewires power dynamics, and often meets fierce resistance. Its success depends on leadership committed to ethical governance and bold experimentation.

Across the continent, leadership schools like the Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance and mechanisms like the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) play a vital role in cultivating reform-minded leadership. But their mandates must be expanded to include curriculum on adaptive institutions, AI governance, and sovereignty in an age of surveillance capitalism.

Equally important is the mobilisation of citizen power. Institutional reform must become a popular demand, not a top-down imposition. Public pressure – from trade unions, youth formations, technologists, and social movements – must push for transparency, reform, and state responsiveness.

Institutional sovereignty is geopolitical sovereignty

In an age where development depends not only on capital but on institutional intelligence, the capacity of Global South nations to shape their futures hinges on the quality of their institutions. This is not only about improving service delivery but about defending sovereignty in an age of data monopolies, financial surveillance, and global volatility.

The multipolar world demands multipolar institutions – rooted in local realities, aligned with regional aspirations, and capable of global negotiation. To remain relevant, the post-colonial state must rewire itself for a new epoch.

Because in the final analysis, broken institutions don't just hinder growth. They endanger authentic democracy. And in the Global South, the project of freedom is too urgent – and too unfinished – to let that happen.

RECLAIMING VALUE

AFRICA'S STRATEGIC GREEN MINERALS AND THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF A JUST TRANSITION

Bhekumuzi Bhebhe, Executive Director, Africa Change Lab

The promise of industrial transformation

Africa's rich reserves of green strategic minerals position the continent as a key player in the global effort to confront the climate crisis and advance green industrialisation. In the face of a deepening climate collapse, resources like chromium, manganese, lithium, copper, iron, and steel offer Africa a chance to accelerate its own energy transition and build new development pathways.

Yet this opportunity unfolds against a backdrop of economic vulnerability. Many African countries remain trapped in cycles of sovereign debt that erode economic sovereignty and narrow fiscal space for essential investments in health, education, and infrastructure.

Breaking the cycle of extraction and dependency

The legacy of exporting raw materials while importing finished goods has kept African economies at the margins of global value chains. We have become consumers of what we do not produce, and producers of what we do not consume. Breaking this pattern is not only an economic necessity but a moral and environmental imperative. The global shift toward green industrialisation offers Africa a rare chance to turn resource wealth into an engine for development and climate resilience.

The transformation must begin with local value addition. Instead of exporting raw materials, African nations need the means of implementation to process and refine minerals domestically, and manufacture higher-value products such as batteries, solar panels, and renewable energy components. This approach would create skilled jobs, boost government revenues, and strengthen resilience in global supply chains. Regional collaboration under frameworks like the African Continental Free Trade Area can help countries build shared infrastructure and harmonise policies to support beneficiation and green manufacturing.

Partnerships, policy, and political vision

To succeed, this shift requires political vision, strategic investment, and technological partnership. Africa must align its industrial ambitions with emerging global powers through platforms such as BRICS and China's Belt and Road Initiative, ensuring that these partnerships promote technology transfer, not dependency. The developmental vision must combine infrastructure investment with renewable energy generation to anchor a new model of South–South collaboration built on equity and shared prosperity.

But industrial growth alone is not enough. Africa's transition must be context-led, grounded in lived experiences, and designed so that local communities benefit directly through better livelihoods, fair labour practices, and environmental protection.

Africa failed to capitalise on previous 'mineral booms', emerging with limited industrialisation, sluggish growth, and fiscal crises triggered by falling commodity prices. It cannot afford to repeat those mistakes. Green strategic minerals alone will not make the continent a manufacturing powerhouse. A Pan-African industrial policy rooted in a just transition is essential to ensure that mineral wealth drives inclusive and sustainable development.

With the world's youngest population and vast renewable potential, Africa can lead by example in building a clean energy future rooted in equity. Strategic investments in education, research, and innovation will nurture the technical capacity needed to process minerals and manufacture clean technologies. By fostering regional value chains and green industries, the continent can lay the foundation for an integrated, resilient economy that serves its people first.

Turning resources into resilience

Africa's mineral wealth is not merely a commodity; it is leverage for transformation. By rejecting extractive patterns and embracing cooperative, value-driven industrialisation, the continent can move from being a supplier of raw materials to a producer of shared prosperity. The path forward lies in turning resources into resilience, ensuring that Africa's green minerals power not only the world's energy transition but also its own economic renewal.

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FROM FRAGMENTATION TO FUNCTION

SOUTH AFRICA'S MULTILATERAL MOMENT

Aaliyah Vayez, Political and Security Risk Analyst

The world order is shifting in profound and unpredictable ways. Global governance, once anchored in cooperative multipolarity, now reflects deep fragmentation, competing norms, and declining trust among major powers. As Nathalie Tocci of the Istituto Affari Internazionali argues, the world today is "multipolar, but not cooperative – fragmented and normatively incoherent." This incoherence has narrowed the space for cooperation, even as global polycrises demand collective solutions.

For middle powers like South Africa, this landscape offers both constraint and opportunity. Influence can no longer rest on moral authority or symbolic representation alone; it must be exercised through strategic, layered engagement.

Through its membership in both BRICS and the G20, South Africa can pursue a multipronged approach focused on three interlocking spheres – economy, security, and diplomacy. Together, this approach will enable the successful navigation of a fragmentated and evolving multilateral world order.

Economy: From fragility to flexibility

Geoeconomic relations have evolved from being defined by shifts brought on by war or recession to the gradual erosion of principles that have underpinned the multilateral system. In the trade arena, unpredictable Western engagement has accelerated the weakening of global value chains, rules and institutions, which many African countries have only recently been integrated into.

A case in point is the impact of the Trump administration's tariffs on countries such as Madagascar, Lesotho and Kenya – countries previously rewarded for their adherence to trade norms and use of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) – who are now subject to fragility, market restrictions and constrained fiscal space amidst existing increasing inequality and declining economic growth rates that characterise the continent.

Conversely, major actors are now pursuing unilateral and selective engagement strategies. With a preference for bilateral trade agreements and exclusive trading blocs, the global trading system is no longer defined by shared norms but by changing power dynamics.

For South Africa and middle powers alike, these dynamics represent an inflection point whereby countries can no longer rely on existing mechanisms that have encouraged integration into the global economy. Rather, they must use multilateralism to counter fragility with flexibility by rethinking and reshaping their economic futures.

Multilateral groupings provide ample opportunity to create diversified trade partnerships. This is most strongly evident in African countries' trade partnerships with all BRICS countries, which contributed to South-South trade surging from USD 600 billion in 1995 to over USD 5.3 trillion by 2021, surpassing North-South trade. But, the University of Cape Town's Carlos Lopes rightly asserts that "diversification alone is not enough... countries must invest in building regional resilience" through initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which will enable a wholesale reimagining of Africa's position and contribution to global trade flows.

Similarly, groupings like the G20 and BRICS provide a platform for South Africa to address the fundamental gap between conditions which threaten Africa's economic security and the tools available to remedy them. The most tenable of which are the continent's growing debt and reliance on development financing.

While both BRICS and the G20 have introduced frameworks and even institutions to shift conversations around development financing and debt repayments, South Africa must maintain the push for modest reforms such as greater transparency, more predictable timelines and the inclusion of non-traditional creditors. More so, it must increase the pushback against biased credit ratings and explore innovative financial mechanisms such as blended finance, regional development funds and climate-linked investment.

These efforts will go far in ensuring that multilateralism remains both a valuable tool for developing countries to exert substantive economic influence in the global economic landscape, notwithstanding unpredictable economic power shifts and systemic constraints.

Security: Stability as strategy

African insecurity is defined by complex threats, from insurgencies and political instability to unequal access to food and water, which, as data from the 2024 Ibrahim Index of African Governance (IIAG) shows, mirror weak governance and deep structural vulnerability.

However, while the space and resources to address this insecurity have narrowed, it has become more important than ever to acknowledge that African insecurity has global consequences. From migration pressures to disrupted supply chains, these dynamics increasingly threaten the long-term stability of the Global North.

While BRICS and the G20 are not security alliances, South Africa has the prerogative to use these groupings as a platform to argue this case and frame Africa's long-term security as a global risk vector.

As Signal Risk's Ronak Gopaldas argues, this also means asserting Africa's "value proposition" more aggressively. Africa is increasingly the most demographically significant continent, with the world's youngest population and one in four people on earth estimated to be African by 2050.

As such, if security conditions that enable technological development, economic advancement, political stability and human safety are not improved, the consequences thereof will be global crises.

Using multilateralism to champion investment in Africa's security is both an approach to development and global risk mitigation. South Africa will be a defining voice in the next era of global governance and multilateralism to come.

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Diplomacy: Representation with responsibility

Africa is more visible now than ever before in global governance, with its demographic and economic importance increasing and major powers competing for its partnership in the very settings of the G20, BRICS and the like.

However, with representation comes responsibility; thus, the necessity for continental alignment on priorities cannot be overstated. Without this, and as the Institute for Global Dialogue's Faith Mabera agrees, the continent risks entering another cycle of dependency and a missed opportunity to treat multipolarity not as a slogan but as a "space of struggle, where it can advance its own priorities."

In the face of divergent national and sub-regional ambitions, overlapping memberships to regional economic groupings and an African Union whose credibility is undermined by limited resources and inconsistent delivery, continental alignment is often difficult to define or translate into real influence.

It requires coherence, strategic planning and fundamental political willingness to act collectively. South Africa must make clear that pathways for such action include achieving independence for continental and regional institutions, bolstering technical capacity for engagement on complex continental issues, strengthening enforcement of continental initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Agreement and ensuring that national objectives are aligned with continental goals.

In learning from the South African Institute of International Affairs' Gustavo de Carvalho, these efforts may constitute a calculated advancement of the continent's structural capacities and pragmatic adaptation to enduring systemic limitations, which, in turn, have the potential to define global governance transformation.

At present, the durability of multilateralism is itself uncertain. The United States, once its chief architect, has increasingly discredited BRICS and the G20 while wavering in its own commitment to collective governance under the Trump administration.

Its upcoming G20 presidency introduces both a warning and an opening for South Africa post its own presidency – a warning that progress achieved through cooperation can easily be undone, but also an opportunity to consolidate gains and defend the principle of shared problem-solving.

For South Africa, the lesson is clear: in a fragmented order, multilateralism remains the most practical instrument of agency for middle powers. By pursuing economic, security and diplomatic objectives in BRICS, the G20, and others, South Africa can help preserve what still works, reform what must change, and build a foundation for cooperation that endures.

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DYNAMIC INDUSTRIAL GOVERNANCE AND AFRICA'S SECOND LIBERATION

Dr Tebogo Lefifi, Founding Partner, The China Africa Law & Investment Desk

The conversation about African industrialisation has fundamentally shifted. We are no longer asking if it will happen, but how it can be orchestrated to avoid the environmental and social failures of historical models. This demands a new industrial imagination — one that fuses governance, sustainability, and African agency with the transformative potential of digital and green technologies. Across Africa's industrial corridors, from Lesotho's textile workshops to Nairobi's solar panels, a quiet revolution is forming. It's not about factories; it's about freedom: the power to decide what gets built, who benefits, and who learns. Industrial policy, long dormant under neoliberal lethargy, is returning not as nostalgia but as necessity. Africa's next liberation is economic, coordinated, green, and digital.

This shift is called "green structural transformation": an economy designed not for extraction but for invention. Governance is not red tape; it is infrastructure for trust. African states can no longer be passive; they must steer technological transformation toward societal missions. Industrial policy becomes a dynamic, living strategy that harnesses AI, clean energy, and innovation, powered by institutions robust and agile enough to allow African nations to command their own economic destiny.

Governance as a productive asset

Every industrial miracle begins with governance that learns. Development is not control but coordination: states must listen, adapt, and act. This "possibilist" approach accepts that policy must be experimental, iterating and adapting to African institutional contexts. China offers a precedent: Special Economic Zones combined market forces with state guidance in constant trial and error.

Dynamic industrial governance is pragmatic, adaptive, and political. Africa does not need to mimic anyone; it must build its own experimental architecture. In Ethiopia's industrial parks, policy learning happens in real time. Similarly, Shenzhen began as controlled experimentation, proving policy can be a laboratory. Governance, when adaptive, becomes a production factor itself.

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Value-chain learning: Lessons from the textile industry

South Africa's textile industry reminds us that competitiveness is not born of cheap labour but of institutional density: logistics, design, supplier networks, and standards that allow firms to climb rather than cling to the value chain. It requires balanced rules of origin under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), rules that reward collaboration over protectionism.

When those rules work, small countries like Lesotho can import yarn, South Africa can handle branding, Mauritius can export, and the continent as a whole can learn. The same principle applies in emerging clusters spanning from Kenya's agro-processing corridors to Morocco's green automotive sector, where coordination and learning matter more than scale alone. The lesson is simple: industrialisation is not a race to the bottom but a collective climb that the continent can achieve through the free continental agreement.

The AfCFTA as industrial commons

AfCFTA is not just a trade agreement; it is a platform for cooperation. Africa trades little with itself, not because of tariffs but because production systems are disconnected. Infrastructure, finance, and standards—not customs—are the real barriers. The new Digital Trade Protocol could become the spine of integration: digital platforms lower transaction costs, harmonise certification, and connect value chains across borders. Africa's industrial revolution will be as digital as it is industrial. Institutional choreography, a continental alignment council to synchronise incentives and track regional projects, is critical. Coordination, not competition, is the continent's new comparative advantage.

Thinking with China, not like China

China's rise offers Africa a crucial insight; however, success does not come from copying blueprints but from designing feedback loops. The continent requires its own context-sensitive dialogue with global partners, anchored unshakably in African agency. As Deborah Bräutigam, Director of the China–Africa Research Initiative, observed, China's industrial cooperation demonstrates that experimentation, rather than perfection, has been the foundation of its strength. The Chinese often refer to this steady development as 'crossing the river by feeling the stones': pragmatic trial, institutional learning, and rapid adjustment.

Africa can translate this ethos through its own context. For example, by turning Special Economic Zones into Industrial Learning Zones, where governments, firms, and universities co-design policy in motion. This is how partnership becomes co-development: each side contributing knowledge, not dependency.

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Financing power: Climate, capital and control

The Government–Industry Data Exchange Program (GIDEP) report warns that Africa receives less than three per cent of global climate finance. The climate finance gap is not merely a fiscal shortfall; it is a profound imbalance of political power. For Africa to access the capital required for a green industrial revolution, it must move beyond fragmented, nation-by-nation appeals. Climate finance must be redesigned as mission finance that links green funding to productive transformation, not external compliance. This could be achieved through a unified front through a continental Green Industrial Finance Facility. Funded by the continent's development banks, it could ensure that Africa does not plead for inclusion in existing mechanisms, but help redesign fit-for-purpose mechanisms. However, the proposed facility should be designed precisely to counter this, ensuring that green partnerships build domestic industrial capacity and climate resilience, aligning global capital with continental priorities rather than perpetuating old dependencies. A continental Green Industrial Finance Facility could channel green bonds into solar textile zones, electric-mobility clusters, and renewable manufacturing corridors.

Strategic reciprocity: A new social contract

Industrial policy is a social contract between the state and society. Thus, inclusive development depends on negotiated cooperation, where firms grow through state support, and states gain legitimacy through jobs and learning. I call this strategic reciprocity, where states invest in industries that promise shared value, and firms reciprocate through innovation, training, and ethical reinvestment.

This principle extends beyond economics; it is a justice issue. Africa's youth, women, and informal entrepreneurs must see themselves in the industrial story. Otherwise, transformation will be efficient but empty.

The second liberation: Governing for learning

Industrial policy is nationcraft. Africa's second liberation will be won in ministries, laboratories, and boardrooms where production and purpose converge. Governance is Africa's next comparative advantage, and coordination is its frontier. Industrial futures will be determined in the coordination space—where governance, trade, finance, and technology converge. This demands political will, policy coherence, and inclusive partnerships across sectors and borders.

As the world turns its attention to Africa through forums like the G20, the continent must present a vision that is compelling and unequivocal: industrial policy grounded in strategic reciprocity, adaptive learning, and unyielding sovereignty. This is how immense potential becomes self-determined, green, and digitally enabled industrial growth.

BUILDING AFRICA'S FOOD TRADE CORRIDORS

Thandeka Masikane, Founder & Director of ALE Agribusiness

Efficient cross-border food trade can make or break agricultural margins. For farmers and processors alike, time is money, and in the world of perishables, every extra form, inspection, or delay can cut directly into shelf life and profit. Across Africa, post-harvest and logistics losses for perishable goods often reach between 30% and 50%, largely due to weak cold-chain systems and slow border procedures.

Tariffs and inconsistent customs rules further raise costs, limit smallholder access, and slow down regional food trade. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offers a framework to ease these frictions, but success depends on upgrading corridor infrastructure, digitising customs systems, and aligning policies. Products most at risk, like citrus, berries, avocados, chilled beef, poultry, milk, and fresh vegetables, illustrate how delays at borders can wipe out months of investment and labour in hours.

The current challenge

Agribusinesses across the continent face four interconnected barriers:

- High tariffs and para-tariffs: Duties on key goods often total 20-40%, hurting competitiveness and limiting intra-African trade.
- Fragmented customs processes: Duplicated paperwork, manual data entry, and inconsistent rules create multi-day queues for trucks and refrigerated containers.
- Divergent Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Standards: Repeated sampling and certification add unnecessary cost and delay.
- Unequal burden on SMEs: Smaller agribusinesses lack the financial cushion to absorb spoilage or cover added transport and storage expenses.

The result? Lower farm-gate prices and higher consumer costs. Staple crops such as maize, wheat, soya beans, and sunflower oil are affected alongside high-value exports like table grapes, blueberries, potatoes, and tomatoes.

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Food trade corridors as a strategic solution

A food trade corridor is more than a road; it's a combination of infrastructure, smart regulation, and coordinated operations. On established and emerging routes such as the North-South Corridor and the LAPSSET (Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia Transport) Corridor, four priorities can transform outcomes:

- Harmonised documentation: Single-window submissions, pre-arrival processing, and digital phytosanitary certificates to streamline clearance.
- Green lanes for perishables: Risk-based inspections and strict time limits to protect freshness.
- Shared cold-chain infrastructure: Plug-in points, reefer staging areas, and cold rooms at borders and ports to maintain temperature control.
- Digital customs platforms: Interlinked systems connecting customs, SPS agencies, ports, and logistics operators for real-time coordination.

Together, these measures can cut clearance times from days to hours, reduce temperature breaks, lower rejection rates, and boost reliability for retailers and food service buyers across the region.

Agribusiness partnerships to drive progress

While policy reform remains essential, private-sector collaboration can significantly accelerate the creation of efficient food trade corridors across Africa. Strong partnerships between government, industry alliances, and agribusiness players can turn policy ideas into measurable progress on the ground.

One key opportunity lies in collective lobbying under the AfCFTA. By working together, industry alliances, from citrus and berries to meat and grains, can present evidence-based proposals for tariff reductions, seasonal duty suspensions, or quota windows that align with harvest cycles. This collective voice strengthens advocacy efforts and ensures that trade policies are tailored to real production timelines and market needs.

Public-private pilot projects offer another fast track to results. Governments and agribusinesses can co-design simplified, standardised customs forms, implement pre-clearance systems for selected perishables, and test mutual recognition of accredited laboratories to avoid duplicate testing. These pilots can serve as practical demonstrations of how harmonised processes reduce costs and clearance times.

In parallel, shared investment in infrastructure — such as co-financing cold chain nodes, cross-docking facilities, and digital traceability systems — helps maintain product quality, ensures compliance, and builds buyer confidence. When private investors and governments share responsibility for logistics upgrades, both sides benefit from improved trade efficiency and reduced spoilage.

Lastly, knowledge exchange on SPS standards is critical. Joint training and audit programmes can help align safety and phytosanitary protocols across borders, reducing onboarding times for SMEs entering export markets and ensuring consistent quality across the supply chain.

Such collaboration benefits both public and private actors. Governments advance their food security and trade objectives, while businesses gain access to larger, more predictable markets, faster inventory turnover, and fewer losses across key value chains, including beef, poultry, citrus, apples, grapes, and vegetables. Together, these partnerships can build the trust, systems, and infrastructure needed to unlock Africa's regional agribusiness potential.

Moving toward a future of food security

Reducing tariffs and streamlining customs processes offers one of the most direct paths to stabilising prices and strengthening Africa's food systems. Food trade corridors provide a practical blueprint, aligning paperwork, digitising controls, protecting the cold chain, and tracking performance across borders.

The next step is clear: select two high-impact trade lanes, launch public-private pilots, publish measurable savings in time, cost, and rejection rates, and then scale. With focused execution, Africa can unlock integrated regional value chains from cereals and oilseeds to meat and horticulture, moving decisively toward a future of food security, competitiveness, and shared prosperity.

FOOD SECURITY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

CONFRONTING ENVIRONMENTAL, ECONOMIC, AND GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES

Dr Thabang Mabinane, Director of Research and Policy Development, SABYA

The current situation

Food security is a situation where everyone always has access to sufficient, safe, and healthy food that is suitable for their dietary requirements. The United Nations (UN), through its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 'Zero Hunger', predicts achieving global food security by 2030. Yet, with the world's population now exceeding 8 billion in 2025, this target proves unrealistic in every form. While the goal is noble, achieving global food security under current macro conditions seems not only improbable but extremely complex.

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) projects that 512 million people will still face hunger by 2030, further highlighting the immense challenge of achieving the UN's target of zero hunger. Hunger remains a persistent challenge in the Global South. In 2024, nine of the world's top ten food-insecure countries were found in this region. The scale of the crisis is profound, with more than 340 million people – excluding populations in Asia and Oceania – experiencing hunger during the same period. These figures highlight the deep structural inequalities and vulnerabilities that continue to undermine food security across the Global South, particularly in countries such as Palestine, Sudan, Haiti, and South Sudan, which all made it to the top ten world's hungriest countries in 2024.

Key obstacles to food security in the Global South

Environmental issues

Recurrent droughts, floods, and extreme temperatures have disrupted farming systems, damaged infrastructure, and reduced agricultural yields in the Global South. Many smallholder farmers lack access to irrigation and climate-resilient seeds, leaving them exposed to environmental shocks.

Dependence on rainfed agriculture

Approximately 70% of farmers in Africa, South Asia, and Latin America rely on rainfed agriculture. Limited water supply due to the absence of rain increases the risk of crop failure and undermines food security.

Limited access to inputs and technology

Farmers in the Global South countries, particularly in Africa, face barriers to accessing improved seeds and fertilisers, mechanised tools, and digital technologies due to high costs, limited credit facilities, and weak agricultural extension systems.

Governance and policy inefficiencies

Weak institutions, inconsistent agricultural policies, and corruption reduce investment in food systems in the Global South. Lack of coordinated land reform, poor implementation, and insufficient social protection programmes hinder progress.

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Mushrooming population and urbanisation

Rapid population growth intensifies pressure on land and water resources, while urban expansion converts fertile farmland into non-agricultural uses, increasing dependence on imports.

Conflict and political instability

Civil unrest and conflict displace communities, destroy food supply chains, and limit humanitarian access. In regions like the Sahel, Sudan, Palestine, Haiti, and South Sudan, insecurity is a key driver of hunger.

The way forward

To promote climate-resilient agriculture, countries should prioritise investments in irrigation infrastructure, water harvesting technologies, and effective early-warning systems to help farmers adapt to changing weather patterns.

Equally important is the widespread adoption of drought-tolerant farming systems that can sustain productivity under extreme conditions. Empowering women farmers is another crucial pillar of sustainable agricultural development. This includes securing their land rights, ensuring equitable access to financing and agricultural training, and embedding gender equality across all agricultural policy frameworks.

Finally, strengthening governance structures and relevant policies is essential to achieving long-term food security. Governments must develop coherent agricultural and food security strategies while improving coordination between public and private sector stakeholders to ensure more efficient, inclusive, and resilient agricultural systems.

The Global South faces a complex network of obstacles to food security. The problem is not just food availability but access, stability, and utilisation – issues deeply rooted in economic, environmental, and governance structures. Achieving sustainable food systems requires inclusive and forward-looking strategies that combine climate adaptation, gender empowerment, and improved governance and policies.

PARTNERSHIPS AND FUNDING FOR AFRICA'S AGRICULTURAL RENAISSANCE

Bako Maxwell, Executive Director, BMM Corporation

Africa's agricultural sector, which employs over 60% of the continent's workforce and holds the potential to feed not just its people but the world, stands at a crossroads. Yet, it grapples with a staggering US$117 billion financing gap for smallholder farmers and Agricultural Small & Medium Enterprises.

Reimagining agricultural finance for Africa's growth

As world leaders converge in Johannesburg for the 2025 G20 Summit - the first on African soil - under South Africa's presidency, this is our moment to reimagine partnerships and funding mechanisms. By prioritising agricultural finance and bolstering South-South trade agreements, we can unlock sustainable growth, enhance food security, and drive inclusive prosperity.

South Africa's G20 theme, 'Fostering Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainable Development,' resonates deeply with Africa's aspirations. The continent's youth bulge and untapped arable land, over 60% of the world's uncultivated arable soil, position it as a global breadbasket. But realising this vision demands innovative funding. Traditional lenders often shy away from agriculture's perceived risks: weather volatility, limited collateral, and high transaction costs. Enter blended finance, a game-changer that marries public guarantees with private capital to de-risk investments. A good example is the Africa Agriculture and Trade Investment Fund (AATIF), a public-private vehicle backed by Germany's KfW and the European Union (EU) with EUR 30 million in first-loss capital. AATIF channels loans to local banks and agri-SMEs, boosting employment and incomes across value chains from Kenya's maize fields to Senegal's horticulture hubs.

This model isn't isolated. The Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) brokers collaborations between governments, financiers, and entrepreneurs, deploying grants and technical aid to scale digital solutions like mobile money for input purchases. In Tanzania, AGRA's digitally enabled mechanisation has aligned incentives for smallholders, revolutionising livelihoods by reducing costs and increasing yields. Similarly, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) partners with entities like Germany's BMZ to accelerate private investments in inclusive agrifood systems, targeting 6.5 million euros for sustainable data science centres by 2029. These initiatives demonstrate how targeted funding — blending grants, guarantees, and impact investing can catalyse US$10 in private lending for every US$1 of public risk-sharing, as seen in AGRA's facilities with banks like Equity in Kenya.

Strengthening South-South trade for agricultural prosperity

Yet, finance alone won't suffice without markets to absorb Africa's bounty. Here, South-South trade agreements emerge as the vital bridge, fostering equitable exchanges among emerging economies. BRICS+, now encompassing giants like Brazil, India, China, and new entrants such as Egypt and Ethiopia, represents half of global agricultural output and imports. Yet, intra-BRICS agricultural trade hovers at a modest 8% of South Africa's exports, despite the bloc's US$255 billion annual import appetite. Imagine soybeans from Zambia flowing tariff-free to India's processing plants, or South African citrus reaching China's tables without the 14% duties that hobble our producers — duties waived for competitors like Australia under bilateral pacts.

South Africa's BRICS chairmanship in recent years laid the groundwork, securing avocado access to China and lifting beef bans, injecting millions into rural economies. But we need more: a dedicated BRICS agricultural trade pact to slash tariffs, harmonise phytosanitary standards, and prioritise value-added exports. This aligns seamlessly with the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), which could boost intra-African trade by 33% and halve the continent's trade deficit. Pairing AfCFTA with South-South deals creates a multiplier effect. Nigerian processors sourcing Ethiopian coffee inputs, financed via AATIF-like funds, while exporting finished goods to India.

Seizing the G20 moment for Africa's agricultural future

At the G20, South Africa must champion these synergies. The Finance Track should advance debt relief for low-income nations and free budgets for agri-investments. Drawing from Brazil's climate-smart agriculture and Indonesia's green finance successes, we can integrate digital tools, like weather-indexed insurance, to build resilience.

The stakes are profound. By 2050, Africa's population will double, demanding 70% more food. Partnerships that fund smallholders, women and youth leading 80% of farms, aren't just economic; they're existential. Let Johannesburg 2025 be the pivot where solidarity turns potential into plenty, where South-South ties weave a tapestry of shared abundance. Africa's fields are fertile; now, let's sow the seeds of collective action.

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SOUTH-SOUTH AGRICULTURAL AGREEMENTS

Chloé Maluleke, Associate and Russia & Middle East Specialist, BRICS+ Consulting Group

In 1995, trade between developing economies made up only 10% of global exports. Today, it accounts for nearly 30%, worth over US$5 trillion annually. Agriculture is a major driver of this growth. According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation, a specialised agency within the United Nations, trade in agri-food products between developing countries exceeded US$700 billion in 2023, driven by demand for fertilisers, seeds, and processed foods.

Within Africa, intra-continental agricultural trade has grown by 12% year-on-year, and under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), it could rise by 81% by 2045, adding US$34 billion in annual exports. For many nations, this isn't just trade, it's structural transformation.

Barriers still holding trade back

Progress, however, remains uneven. Tariffs on processed foods remain high, averaging 17% across African regions, while non-tariff barriers, like inconsistent customs systems and SPS (sanitary and phytosanitary) rules, delay exports. The Afreximbank estimates that poor infrastructure and weak cold chains cost Africa up to 30% of its perishable exports annually.

Financing trade in local currencies also remains a challenge, though systems like PAPSS (Pan-African Payment and Settlement System) are beginning to change that. These bottlenecks make clear that trade integration needs more than agreements; it needs coordination, investment, and trust.

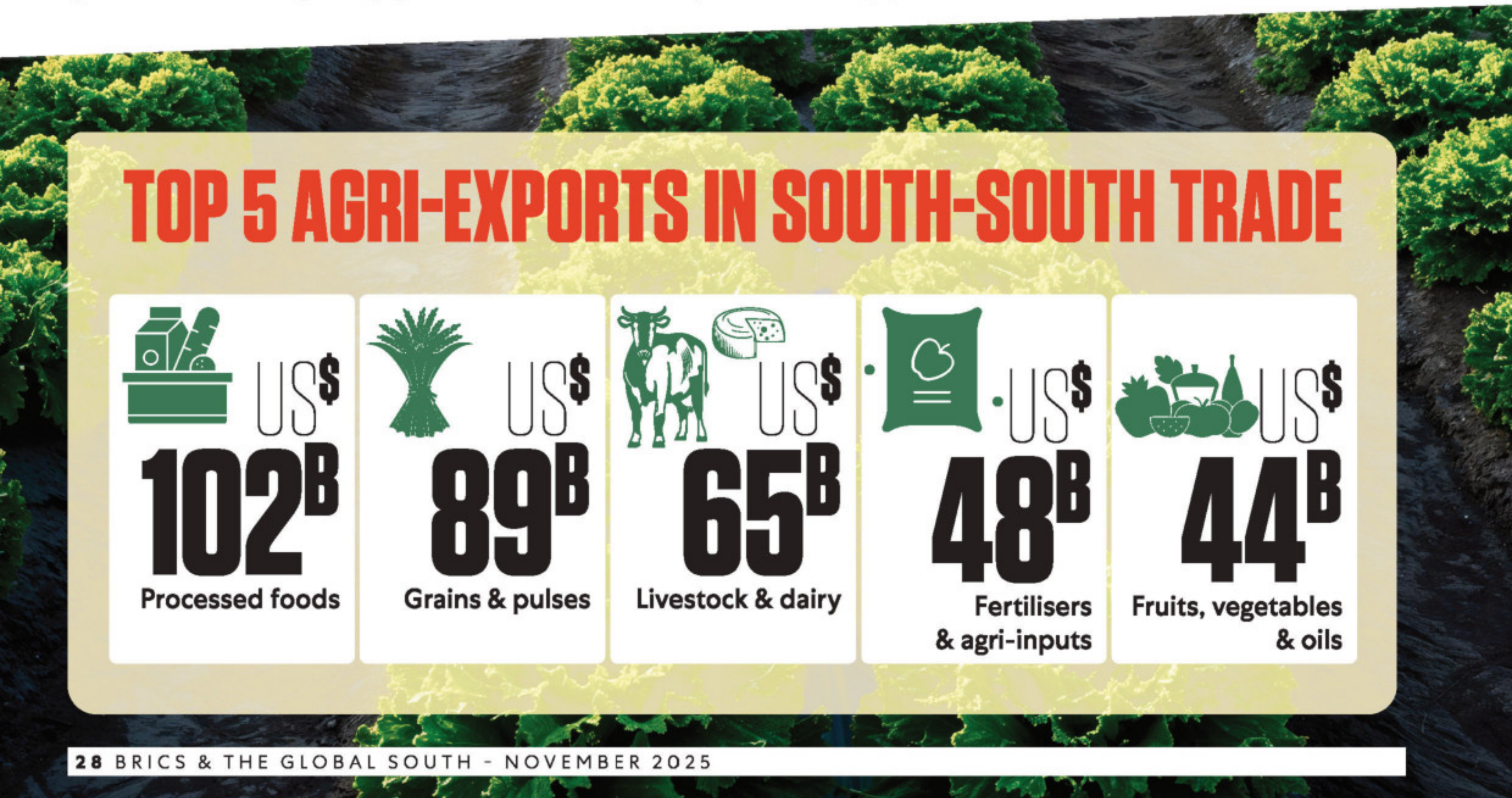
New agreements, new corridors

The AfCFTA's Guided Trade Initiative is already moving agri-goods tariff-free across eight pilot countries. Brazil and Nigeria signed a US$1 billion agricultural mechanisation deal this year to enhance food production and equipment exchange. China's partnership with Kenya has boosted tea exports by 23%, while India and Mozambique's pulses partnership is helping stabilise food supply on both sides.

These agreements aren't simply about market access; they're about sharing knowledge, technology, and logistics. They lay the groundwork for a trade system that recognises interdependence as strength.

Lowering barriers, raising futures

When trade flows freely, smallholder farmers become exporters, not just producers. Harmonised rules reduce waste, and regional finance reduces vulnerability to currency shocks. With AfCFTA and BRICS leading the charge, South–South agricultural trade is proving that cooperation, not competition, is the true foundation of sustainable growth.



TOP 5 AGRI-EXPORTS IN SOUTH-SOUTH TRADE

US$ 102B	Processed foods
US$ 89B	Grains & pulses
US$ 65B	Livestock & dairy
US$ 48B	Fertilisers & agri-inputs
US$ 44B	Fruits, vegetables & oils

SOWING SEEDS OF SOVEREIGNTY

HOW BRICS+ CAN EMPOWER RURAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

John Nyambane, Sociologist & Researcher, and Wasseem Emam, Founder of Ethical Seafood Research

Reclaiming food sovereignty in the Global South

Across the Global South, rural communities are reclaiming agency over their food systems amid intersecting crises of climate change, food insecurity, inequality, and geopolitical realignment. As BRICS+ emerges as a counterweight to Western-dominated development paradigms, its potential to reshape agricultural cooperation is profound. By linking innovation, finance, and localised governance, BRICS+ can strengthen the resilience of smallholder farmers who remain the backbone of food systems across Africa and the Global South.

In the heart of rural African countries such as Kenya, smallholder farmers live a paradox emblematic of the Global South, regions blessed with agricultural abundance yet plagued by chronic vulnerability. Despite months of careful cultivation, farmers routinely lose significant portions of their harvests to inadequate storage, limited market access, and climate-induced shocks. Recent data show that nearly 30–40% of Kenya's post-harvest yield is lost each year due to poor infrastructure and minimal technological integration. These persistent challenges perpetuate cycles of food insecurity, rural poverty, and dependency, diminishing Kenya's capacity to achieve agricultural self-sufficiency and economic sovereignty.

This reality is not unique to Kenya. Across Latin America, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa, structural inequalities in trade, financing, and climate resilience have constrained local production systems and weakened national autonomy over food resources. The paradox lies in the fact that these same regions, rich in fertile land and human capital, collectively produce a large share of the world's agricultural commodities while remaining net importers of essential food products. Such dependency illustrates the enduring asymmetries of the global agricultural order, where the Global South remains entangled in unequal value chains dominated by industrialised economies.

images/ freepik.com

In this evolving framework, sovereignty is not limited to national self-sufficiency but encompasses local empowerment, gender inclusivity, and the revitalisation of indigenous agricultural knowledge systems. In Kenya, where women represent over 65% of the agricultural workforce, sovereignty entails reconfiguring access to resources, markets, and adaptive technologies that can enhance resilience and productivity.

The transformative role of BRICS+ in agricultural resilience

BRICS+ can play a catalytic role in this transformation through South–South cooperation — facilitating technology transfer, climate-resilient investment, and capacity-building initiatives that address the intersecting challenges of food insecurity and economic dependency. The New Development Bank (NDB), as the financial arm of BRICS+, provides a mechanism for channelling sustainable agricultural financing, particularly for smallholder farmers and rural enterprises.

For Kenya and similar economies, participation in these platforms could yield multiple benefits. It could facilitate technology transfer for precision farming, cold storage, and irrigation systems; enable South–South market linkages that reduce dependency on Western export markets; and strengthen food system governance by integrating local policy frameworks with global value-chain reforms. Successful examples from Brazil's Fome Zero (Zero Hunger) programme and India's digital agriculture initiatives demonstrate viable models adaptable to Kenya's devolved governance structure.

In essence, the agricultural paradox of the Global South demands a paradigm shift - from dependency-driven food security to sovereignty-centred sustainability. BRICS+ presents not just an economic alliance but a political opportunity to rewrite the narrative of rural resilience in Kenya, where sovereignty begins not in the halls of global summits but in the fields where farmers sow the seeds of a self-reliant future.

The way forward

Four policy strategies to operationalise a sovereignty-based model in Africa's agriculture sector include localised investment mechanisms, knowledge co-production, inclusive governance, and digital transformation. The NDB should prioritise concessional financing for smallholder-led agriculture, establishing regional BRICS+ agroecology hubs, integrating food sovereignty principles into African countries' agricultural policy, and expanding access to agri-tech platforms through public-private partnerships.

Africa's food security needs a shift from technocratic interventions to adaptive governance systems that value local agency and ecological sustainability. Resilient countries embed food systems within socio-ecological realities, not just productivity indicators. African's experience emphasises the need for multi-scalar collaboration, bridging global frameworks with local institutions. Future research should use longitudinal and spatial data to trace local adaptation's mediating role in food insecurity outcomes under climate stress.

The future of food security across the Global South lies not just in increasing food production but in reclaiming the right to produce on their own terms. BRICS+ presents a promising framework through which rural communities can shift from dependency to dignity.

By integrating finance, technology, and local knowledge, BRICS+ can help cultivate the seeds of sovereignty across Africa's smallholder landscapes. The African experience serves as a microcosm of what a post-Western agricultural order might resemble: decentralised, cooperative, and grounded in ecological justice. This shift not only promises to enhance food security but also empowers communities to define their own agricultural futures, free from the constraints of traditional, top-down models of development.

FOOD VS FUEL

THE IMPACT OF BIOFUELS ON FOOD SECURITY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Jyoshil Pitamber, Managing Director, Gusheshe Fuels

The "Food vs Fuel" debate has long questioned whether growing crops for energy might compete with global food needs. It's an important concern, but evidence increasingly suggests that the real challenge lies in how much food is wasted, rather than how much is converted into biofuel. Across South Africa and the world, nearly one-third of all food produced is wasted, enough to feed millions every year. In nature, waste equals food. Humanity still has work to do in learning that lesson.

In South Africa, roughly 10 million tonnes of food are wasted annually, much of it lost before reaching a plate. Globally, around 1.3 billion tonnes of food are discarded each year. This represents a staggering inefficiency across production, logistics, storage, and consumption. These losses remind us that the world produces more than enough food; the task is to use it more wisely.

image/ freepik.com

Biofuel leaders of the Global South

Brazil offers a valuable case study for the Global South. Decades of experience with sugar cane-based ethanol have shown that food and fuel can coexist successfully. While sugar demand has plateaued as consumers become more health-conscious, ethanol production has provided farmers with stable income, rural employment, and export opportunities – without compromising food availability. By integrating food and fuel markets, Brazil has demonstrated that sustainable bioenergy can strengthen, rather than weaken, food security.

Modern biofuel production has evolved far beyond the "Food vs Fuel" debate. Bioethanol refineries now use every part of the sugar cane or field corn crop. Fermentable material becomes ethanol. The remaining portion becomes Distillers Dried Grains with Solubles (DDGS), a high-protein animal feed, in the case of field corn. DDGS replaces traditional feed 1:1 in nutritional value, meaning ethanol production complements, rather than competes with, the food system. It's no longer Food vs Fuel. It's Food and Fuel.

South African innovation in biofuels

Simultaneously, technology continues to push boundaries. A South African pilot project is already converting hotel food waste into fuel-grade ethanol, proving that even discarded meals can become clean energy. Meanwhile, algae to ethanol research shows immense promise – certain strains of algae have already been isolated that produce starch rather than simple biomass.

Algae thrives on non-arable desert land under intense sunlight, and can be nourished by sewage. This approach could turn waste and sunlight into renewable energy without using food crop land, while simultaneously addressing urban wastewater challenges across the Global South.

While hydrogen and electric vehicles both aim to decarbonise transport, their real-world practicality remains limited. Hydrogen fuel cells are still far from market-ready, requiring costly storage, high-pressure systems, and entirely new distribution networks. Electric vehicles, though admirable, depend heavily on lithium, cobalt, and rare earth mining; resources that carry significant environmental and social costs, especially in developing regions.

In contrast, E85 (a fuel blend of 85% ethanol and 15% gasoline) stands out as a sustainable, balanced, immediate solution to petroleum-gasoline fossil fuel. It possesses an energy density comparable to petrol (gasoline), while hydrogen and batteries offer significantly lower energy content per kilogram. That means ethanol delivers range and performance without the weight penalties or infrastructure complications of other green technologies.

The internal combustion engine (ICE) is a mature, globally mass-produced technology which can be easily optimised for E85, combining extreme efficiency, reliability, familiarity, and affordability. Since transport remains the backbone of every economy, sustainable fuels like E85 can power growth without disruption, offering potential savings of 15–25% per kilometre compared to fossil fuels.

Meanwhile, converting ethanol into sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) remains an inefficient detour at present. It takes around 1.615 litres of ethanol to produce just 1 litre of jet fuel, which is a yield of roughly 62%. SAF production is expensive, centralised, and adds limited employment opportunities, as most airport operations already have fixed staffing structures.

In contrast, expanding E25-E85 blends for ground transport stimulates local economies by creating ongoing employment in agriculture, logistics, and retail fuel distribution. E85 benefits communities on the ground, while SAF would largely benefit the billionaire's excuse for chartering private jet trips. Adapting jet engines to run directly on bioethanol could be a better long-term engineering pathway, though such innovation may take a decade or more to materialise.

It's important to recognise that no single energy pathway is "wrong". Hydrogen, electric vehicle, and biofuel technologies all have vital roles to play in a balanced future energy mix. Diversity allows nations to pursue solutions that fit their local resources and economic realities. Even crude oil and coal will continue to serve specific purposes for decades to come. Innovation can ensure the world steadily reduces its dependence on these finite fossil resources. Diversity, not dogma, will drive true sustainability.

As an automotive enthusiast, I admire E85 for its blend of passion and purpose. It offers superior 108 RON Octane, cleaner combustion, and up to 60% lower carbon emissions, proving that performance and environmental responsibility can coexist. It's a win-win fuel that rewards engineering, thrills the driver, and respects the planet, all at once.

THE BIG DIGITAL LEAP

Manyane Manyane, Investigative Journalist, IOL

The next frontier of growth isn't just physical infrastructure – it's the invisible networks of data, digital services and ethical AI that connect us all

> "Digital inclusion is not just about access; it is about meaningful connectivity and participation in the economy and society."
> – Solly Malatsi

Digital connectivity has the potential to deliver transformative economic empowerment, according to Minister of Communications and Digital Technologies, Solly Malatsi.

Malatsi said this will allow South Africans to learn new skills and expand access to economic opportunities.

To this end, the future of the digital economy and AI innovation will unfold at the G20 Leaders' Summit in Johannesburg in November.

The summit takes place amid global challenges including climate change with its impacts like extreme weather and food insecurity, economic instability such as inflation and poverty, health crises including pandemics, growing income inequality and societal polarisation, and threats from conflict, emerging technologies, and the erosion of truth and democracy.

Solutions

Digital economies and innovation are expected to offer solutions by increasing access to essential services such as education and healthcare, fostering sustainable development through optimised resource management, creating new job opportunities and economic growth, and improving global connectivity and collaboration.

Technologies such as broadband internet, AI and digital payments enable remote work, precision agriculture, and efficient e-government services, contributing to poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, and enhanced productivity.

Malatsi, speaking to Independent Media ahead of the summit, outlined four strategic focus areas under South Africa's G20 Digital Economy Presidency: connectivity, digital public infrastructure (DPI), innovation ecosystems for MSMEs, and ethical artificial intelligence (AI).

He said the government's vision is to build a dynamic, inclusive and globally competitive digital economy that empowers citizens and unlocks opportunities for businesses of all sizes.

The government is committed to enabling this future through progressive policies, meaningful connectivity for all, public-private partnerships, digital infrastructure investment, and reskilling and upskilling the workforce for the digital age.

Connection

"Digital inclusion is a top priority. We have launched initiatives such as SA Connect and Connect Mzansi, focused on extending broadband to underserved communities, schools, clinics and public institutions. We are also expanding access to devices and digital literacy through partnerships with entities and the private sector.

"Digital inclusion is not just about access; it is about meaningful connectivity and participation in the economy and society.

"We aim to create a conducive environment for policies that attract investments and promote competition, starting with a comprehensive review of legislation regulating the ICT sector," Malatsi said.

Recovery

Indonesia's 2022 summit stressed the importance of digital connectivity and post-pandemic recovery under the theme "Recover Together, Recover Stronger," focusing on inclusive transformation and digital literacy.

India's 2023 presidency promoted digital public infrastructure as a global good, launching a Global Digital Public Infrastructure Repository to share open technological solutions and knowledge worldwide.

Brazil, in 2024, focused on digital inclusion,

universal and meaningful connectivity, inclusive digital public infrastructure, and AI for sustainable development and inequality reduction.

Cash-lite

Although not fully cashless, countries like Japan, Spain and France are increasing digital payment adoption, with between 60% and 67% preferring cashless payments in 2021, according to the World Economic Forum.

Malatsi said South Africa is steadily progressing toward a cash-lite society, with digital payment systems increasingly adopted across sectors.

"Innovations in mobile money, banking apps, QR codes and fintech platforms are driving this change. For this transition to be equitable, it must be accompanied by digital access and financial literacy. Instant electronic payment schemes like PayShap are making it easier for South Africans to use digital payments," he said.

The government aims to accelerate this trend through regulatory support and improved digital infrastructure, ensuring all South Africans, regardless of location or income, can participate. This will also help government save resources on printing, storing, transportation and security.

DPI is essential to building a modern and responsive government. The launch of the Digital Transformation Roadmap for Government reflects this.

South Africa is laying the groundwork for digital ID systems, secure e-payment platforms and integrated public service portals.

According to Malatsi, this will create a government that is transparent, citizen-focused and digitally enabled.

Benefits include improved service delivery through faster, more transparent public services enabled by data interoperability; economic empowerment via digital entrepreneurship, fintech growth and digital skills employment; reduced inequality through expanded access to information, digital tools and markets; and enhanced international competitiveness by aligning digital infrastructure and governance with global standards.

AI ethics

South Africa is also committed to an ethical AI future that reflects the country's identity, values and constitutional rights.

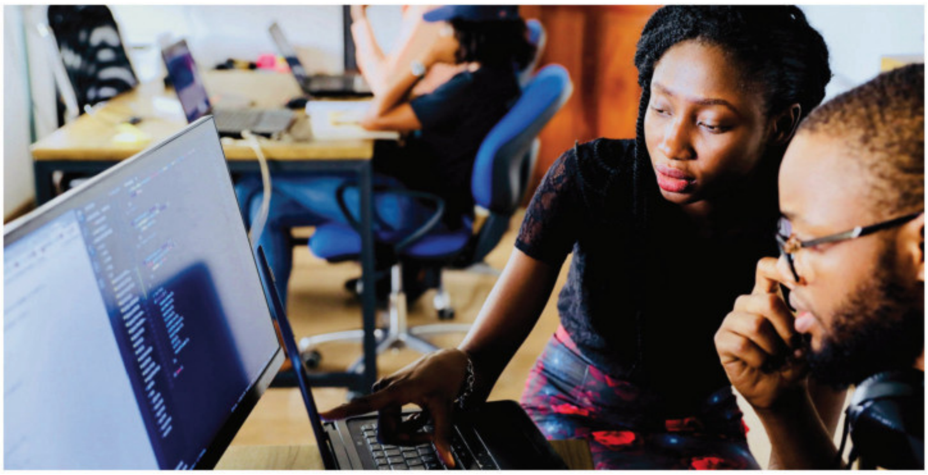
"We believe AI should promote human dignity, equity and inclusion. Our approach prioritises transparency, fairness and safeguards against bias. This means AI systems must understand our diverse languages, support local innovation and not reinforce existing inequalities.

"We are finalising the National AI Policy to guide ethical development and deployment, informed by local research, global best practices and public consultation."

Speaking at the G20 Digital Economy Working Group and Task Force on AI in the Eastern Cape earlier this year, Malatsi said the digital divide, if unaddressed, will become the new face of global inequality. But through cooperation, the digital revolution can drive unprecedented inclusion and equity.

This includes bilateral partnerships with countries such as India, China, Brazil and members of the European Union on digital infrastructure, skills training and innovation exchanges.

South Africa will also participate in global platforms such as the G20 Digital Economy Working Group, the UN's Global Digital Compact process and African Union digital economy initiatives.



DIGITAL SKILLS TRANSFORMATION
REGULATING THE PLATFORM ECONOMY

Dr Nkosinothando Chamane, South African BRICS Youth Association

The digital economy has become the defining force of the 21st century, reshaping how people work, produce, and consume. At the heart of this transformation lies the platform economy, a system powered by digital intermediaries such as taxi services, urban food delivery services, domestic services, and countless local equivalents. These platforms have disrupted traditional industries and created new pathways for income generation, innovation, and entrepreneurship. Yet, beneath the promise of flexibility and access lies a profound challenge: how do we regulate this new economy to ensure fairness, inclusion, and sustainability?

The platform paradox

Platform-based work thrives on the illusion of autonomy. Workers are called 'partners' or 'independent contractors', enjoying flexible hours but often without social protection, fair wages, or collective bargaining rights. This reclassification of labour has blurred the lines between employment and entrepreneurship, creating a regulatory grey zone. Governments worldwide are struggling to adapt existing labour and competition laws to the fluid, data-driven nature of digital platforms. This paradox between empowerment and exploitation demands a regulatory response that preserves innovation while protecting human dignity. The platform economy must not be allowed to perpetuate the same digital inequality it aims to disrupt.

Digital skills: The foundation of inclusion

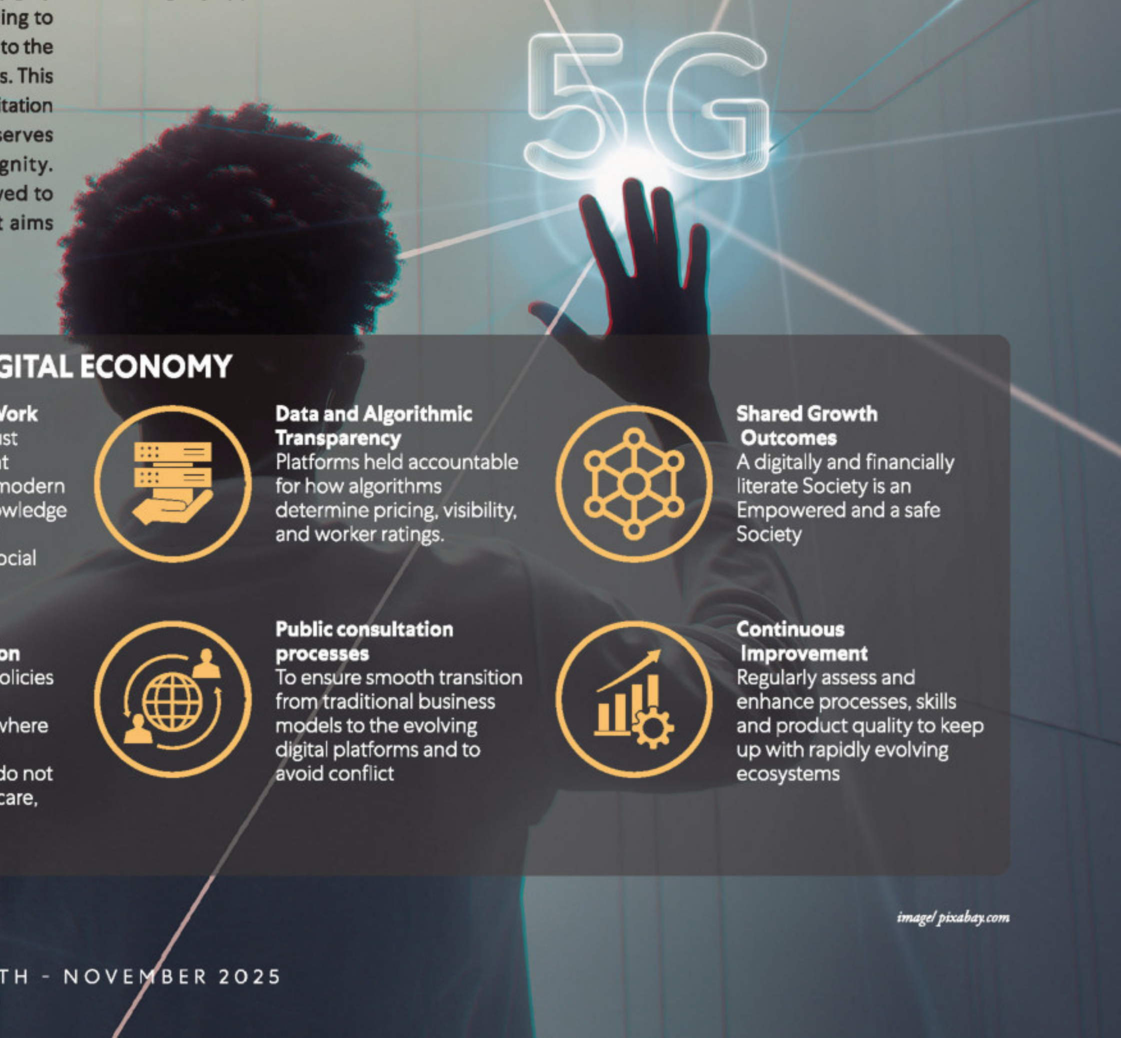
Digital transformation without skills transformation and proper regulation risks deepening inequality. In many developing and emerging economies, digital literacy remains uneven, limiting participation in the new digital labour market. The ability to navigate online tools, understand digital finance, and manage one's data privacy are now essential competencies for economic participation. Governments, therefore, have a dual responsibility: to empower and to regulate, where regulation should create fair and safe digital marketplaces, while investment in digital education should ensure that workers and entrepreneurs can thrive in them. Skills development initiatives, particularly in low-income and rural areas, can bridge the gap between the digital elite and the digitally excluded, fostering inclusive growth.

Towards a regulated, inclusive digital economy

Regulation of the platform economy should balance innovation with accountability, and the following key approaches are recommended:

Building a human-centred digital future

The digital economy is not just a technological shift, but a social transformation. The challenge before policymakers is to ensure that this transformation empowers rather than exploits and excludes. Regulating the platform economy is not about suffocating innovation but about humanising it. Through embedding digital literacy, ethical data use, and fair labour practices at the core of digital governance, societies can build a future where technology serves people and growth outcomes can be shared instead of perpetuating digital inequality and institutionalising precarity as the norm of modern work.



REGULATED INCLUSIVE DIGITAL ECONOMY

Reclassification of Work
Legal frameworks must redefine employment categories to reflect modern realities and to acknowledge flexible work models while guaranteeing social protection.

Data and Algorithmic Transparency
Platforms held accountable for how algorithms determine pricing, visibility, and worker ratings.

Shared Growth Outcomes
A digitally and financially literate Society is an Empowered and a safe Society

Skills and Social Protection Integration
Skills development policies to be linked to social protection systems, where workers transitioning between digital gigs do not lose access to healthcare, pensions, or training opportunities.

Public consultation processes
To ensure smooth transition from traditional business models to the evolving digital platforms and to avoid conflict

Continuous Improvement
Regularly assess and enhance processes, skills and product quality to keep up with rapidly evolving ecosystems

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HUMAN BY DESIGN

WHY THE FUTURE OF AI IN EDUCATION MUST BEGIN WITH EMPATHY

Shanti Maluleke, Founder of B.Still Foundation

images/ freepik.com

Can AI make learning more human?

As artificial intelligence reshapes education, one question becomes urgent: Can AI truly make learning more human? The global conversation often focuses on innovation and access: integrating AI into classrooms, expanding digital literacy, and preparing students for a tech-driven future. Yet access alone does not equal equity.

Across the Global South, millions of learners face barriers that technology alone cannot solve: poverty, language, trauma, and mental health challenges. In under-resourced classrooms, where emotional and social needs are often overlooked, AI presents both opportunity and risk. It can either deepen inequality or bridge it.

Beyond access: Emotional intelligence as the new frontier

For nations like South Africa and other BRICS+ countries, AI offers a chance to leapfrog systemic barriers. Where decades of underfunded schools and geographic disparities have limited opportunity, AI can provide personalised, scalable learning that is contextually and culturally relevant. It can empower educators, reach underserved populations, and support mental wellness in ways traditional systems have struggled to achieve.

True accessibility is measured not by login counts but by whether learners feel seen, supported, and capable of thriving. The next frontier in education is not only digital, it is emotional.

Imagine systems that adapt to both academic performance and emotional engagement, detecting fatigue, prompting reflection, or connecting learners to support. Imagine teachers freed from administrative burdens, focusing on relationships that define meaningful learning. When designed with empathy, AI can restore the humanity that mass education systems have too often lost.

Redefining progress for an inclusive future

But emotional intelligence must lead the AI revolution in education. Machines may process information faster, but they cannot replace the nuance of empathy – the teacher's intuition, the peer's encouragement, the human instinct to care. Education is not simply the transfer of knowledge; it is the cultivation of self-awareness, connection, and resilience.

For BRICS+ nations and the wider Global South, this is especially urgent. AI can be a tool for inclusive growth, equipping young people with both digital and emotional literacy skills that will define future workforces, foster social cohesion, and strengthen local innovation ecosystems. South Africa, with its diverse population and complex socio-economic landscape, exemplifies both the challenge and opportunity. AI can empower learners in townships and rural areas, shaping a generation ready to thrive in a digital, interconnected world.

Global leaders shaping AI policies must expand the definition of progress. Innovation cannot be measured only by efficiency, but by empathy, by how technology helps us care, include, and understand one another.

The goal is not to build systems that out-think us, but ones that remind us why we think and feel at all.

AI FOR AFRICA

FROM STRATEGY TO INCLUSIVE IMPACT

Sesona Mdlokovana
Associate and Africa Specialist at BRICS+ Consulting Group

Africa is at a crucial turning point. Artificial intelligence (AI) has slowly progressed beyond experimental stages. It is now integrated into national strategies, corporate investments, and operational deployments. This transformation is directly impacting health, agriculture, and financial services across the continent. Guiding these changes is the African Union's Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy (2024), a development-focused blueprint that provides policymakers with a practical framework. This strategy grounds AI within the principles of ethics, inclusion, and regional cooperation.

Opportunities and structural realities

Africa stands on the brink of a significant opportunity, as highlighted by the State of AI in Africa Report 2025. The report gives details about a surge in startup activity, an expansion of pilot programmes across various sectors, and the development of a more sophisticated policy landscape. However, the continent continues to face ongoing challenges, including inconsistent broadband access, unreliable electricity, and a scarcity of skilled engineers and data scientists. These structural issues significantly threaten to concentrate the benefits of this growth in more developed urban centres. Therefore, international collaboration is crucial to prevent technology transfer from leading to dependency rather than genuine local capability, emphasising the need for robust governance and the development of local expertise.

Emerging leaders and practical progress

Significant and demonstrable progress is already evident. For example, Rwanda's National Health Intelligence Center, launched in April 2025, effectively gathers real-time health data. This supports epidemic preparedness, optimises resource allocation, and provides AI-assisted clinical decision support, showcasing how national platforms can have the capability to significantly boost public health impact.

Nigeria's National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (2024) is an example of a governance-first approach, outlining objectives for skills development, research funding, and ethical oversight. This model is now influencing similar initiatives in Kenya and Ghana.

This policy momentum is further enhanced by private investment. Major technology companies are starting to expand regional cloud and AI capabilities, while also committing to large-scale training programmes. Microsoft's multi-million-rand investment in South Africa's AI infrastructure, along with continent-wide training pledges, illustrates the collaborative potential of public and private sectors in building capacity and human capital.

Policy and investment priorities for G20 and BRICS

For G20 and BRICS nations, the urgent policy recommendation is to integrate infrastructure, governance, and human capital.

To securely and affordably host and train AI models, African institutions require blended finance that is directed towards regional compute hubs and resilient energy networks. Endorsing the AU's Continental AI Strategy will serve as a unifying framework for data protection, model audits, and cross-border collaboration, thereby reducing fragmentation and enhancing trust.

Scaling accredited training and apprenticeship programmes is crucial. Certification programmes that link government hiring, corporate procurement, and university research will ground AI ecosystems in local talent, rather than relying on imported expertise.

From vision to implementation

To effectively implement these priorities, practical pilot programmes and responsible financial backing are essential. Collaborative health and agricultural testbeds that mandate local data management, clear evaluation, and open results will establish national models ready for widespread adoption. Development banks, corporate collaborators, and BRICS technical agencies should mitigate the risks of initial deployments through favourable lending and procurement strategies that guarantee skills development and demonstrable social impact.

Africa's AI future

Action is critical now. An achievable package for upcoming summits includes regional compute nodes, scholarship and certification funds, and three co-funded national testbeds. If G20 and BRICS nations align funding with governance and human capital, Africa can shape and govern AI for inclusive development, rather than merely adopting it. Coordinated, deliberate action within the next year will determine if AI propels the continent towards shared prosperity and resilience.

images/ freepik.com

10 CHALLENGES IN GLOBAL AI GOVERNANCE

**Cole Jackson, Lead Associate, BRICS+ Consulting Group, Alumni,
Southern Africa-Netherlands Cyber Security School (SANCS)**

1

Regulatory Fragmentation

The lack of a unified global framework for AI regulation has led to fragmented rules across regions, from the EU's AI Act to China's algorithmic oversight laws. This divergence hinders international cooperation and complicates compliance for global tech firms. A potential solution lies in developing shared principles through multilateral forums such as the UN or OECD to harmonise governance standards.

2

Ethical and Cultural Divergence

Ethical values around privacy, autonomy, and human oversight differ sharply between societies. For instance, facial recognition may be acceptable for security in one country but a privacy violation in another. Establishing cross-cultural dialogues and adaptable ethical frameworks could help balance respect for local norms with global human rights.

3

Data Sovereignty and Access

Nations are increasingly asserting control over data generated within their borders, as seen in India's data localisation policies. This raises tensions between open data sharing for innovation and protecting national interests. Cooperative data trusts and regional agreements could help ensure equitable access while safeguarding privacy and sovereignty.

4

Algorithmic Transparency

AI systems often operate as 'black boxes', making their decisions difficult to interpret or challenge. In sectors like finance or healthcare, this opacity can have serious consequences. Mandating explainability standards and open auditing protocols could foster trust and accountability in critical AI applications.

5

Accountability Gaps

When an autonomous vehicle or AI trading system causes harm, assigning responsibility remains complex. Legal systems are still grappling with who should be held liable — the developer, operator, or user. Establishing clear liability frameworks and AI insurance mechanisms could bridge this accountability void.

6

Security and Weaponisation Risks

AI is rapidly being integrated into military and cyber systems, raising fears of autonomous weapons and large-scale misinformation. The use of AI in drone warfare, for example, has already blurred ethical boundaries. International treaties, similar to those for nuclear or biological weapons, could set limits on AI's military deployment.

7

Economic Displacement

Automation driven by AI threatens millions of jobs worldwide, especially in manufacturing and services. For instance, AI chatbots are replacing customer service roles at scale. Governments and corporations must invest in reskilling programmes and inclusive innovation strategies to ensure that the benefits of AI are broadly shared.

8

Concentration of Power

A handful of corporations dominate AI research, cloud infrastructure, and data ownership — mostly based in the United States and China. This imbalance risks marginalising smaller nations and firms. Encouraging open-source AI models and fostering regional innovation hubs could democratise access to AI technology.

9

Bias and Discrimination

AI systems trained on skewed datasets can perpetuate gender, racial, or socioeconomic bias — seen in recruitment algorithms or facial recognition tools that misidentify minorities. Transparent data governance and diverse design teams are essential to correct systemic inequities.

10

Lack of Global Coordination

AI governance efforts are scattered across different institutions and agendas, from UNESCO to the G7. The absence of a cohesive global body limits progress on ethical and safety standards. Establishing a dedicated Global AI Governance Council under the UN or similar platform could unify and guide international efforts.

ALIGNING AI WITH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:

A BRICS+ IMPERATIVE FOR INCLUSIVE INNOVATION

Dr Ntswaki Matlala, Senior Lecturer at Johannesburg Business School (JBS), and Gugulethu Mkabhela, MBA Candidate at JBS

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is no longer the future; it is the present, reshaping economies, transforming public services, and redefining how societies function. From bustling cities in India to agricultural fields in Brazil, AI is emerging as a strategic lever for development across the Global South. But for AI to truly serve the public good, especially in the context of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it must be consciously designed, locally grounded, and globally governed.

As the BRICS+ nations accelerate AI adoption, the opportunity lies not only in technological innovation but in creating a model of AI that is ethical, inclusive, and sustainable. In that lies both a challenge and a calling.

AI in critical sectors: Bridging systematic gaps

The UN's 2030 Agenda is crystal clear: progress must be inclusive and sustainable. In AI, we find a tool capable of powering that progress if wielded wisely.

Agriculture (SDG 2): AI and IoT (Internet of Things) are revolutionising food security. They are being deployed to guide irrigation schedules, monitor soil conditions, and detect pest infestations. Subsistence farmers in South Africa and Brazil are beginning to access tools once reserved for industrial-scale farmers (also known as commercial farming), thanks to AI-powered apps that work even on low-cost smartphones.

Healthcare (SDG 3): AI has already demonstrated its value in low-resource settings. It can dramatically improve access and quality in under-resourced clinics. Machine learning models are proving effective in diagnosing diseases like tuberculosis, retinopathy, and certain cancers from low-cost scans, overcoming the shortage of specialised medical personnel in rural areas. Telemedicine platforms, powered by AI triage systems, are extending care reach across vast geographical distances in countries like Russia and India.

Education (SDG 4): Machine learning platforms are tailoring content to students' individual needs, improving learning outcomes for children in overcrowded or under-resourced schools. For communities long excluded from quality education, this represents a potential game-changer.

Governance (SDG 16): AI tools are enhancing public service delivery, optimising urban planning, and combating corruption through anomaly detection in public spending.

However, the efficacy of AI deployment is jeopardised without deliberate policy intervention. If AI systems are trained on biased data sets that reflect existing gender, racial, or socio-economic disparities, they risk reinforcing, rather than reducing, systemic inequalities. Deliberate policy is thus required to ensure AI-driven progress translates into inclusive growth.

Opportunities and risks for the BRICS+ agenda

For the BRICS+ nations, AI presents an unprecedented opportunity to leapfrog traditional stages of industrialisation and technological development. By strategically adopting AI, member states can diversify their economies, moving rapidly up the manufacturing and services value chains (SDG 9). This strategic investment fosters technological sovereignty, a key priority for the expanded BRICS bloc seeking a multipolar economic landscape.

The integration and collaboration within the BRICS+ framework are critical here. Shared AI research hubs, cross-border data governance standards, and investment from the New Development Bank (NDB) into AI infrastructure can pool resources and expertise, creating a truly South-South innovation ecosystem.

Yet, this ambitious vision is accompanied by significant risks that must be proactively managed.

Algorithmic bias and digital divide

AI models trained without adequate representation of diverse BRICS+ populations risk inheriting and amplifying biases, leading to discriminatory outcomes in lending, policing, and hiring. Furthermore, the divide between countries that innovate and produce AI and those that merely consume proprietary Western technology threatens to widen global economic disparities, hindering the goal of a balanced global technology order.

Data privacy and security

The efficacy of AI is directly tied to the availability of massive data sets. This necessitates robust, common standards for data privacy and security. A failure to implement strong regulatory frameworks risks widespread data exploitation and potential violations of citizen rights.

Labour Market Disruption (SDG 8)

While AI promises increased productivity, its rapid automation could displace workers in sectors fundamental to BRICS+ economies, particularly low-skilled manufacturing and processing jobs. Planning for massive upskilling and reskilling initiatives is paramount to ensure technological advancement does not lead to mass unemployment and social instability.

Countering these challenges requires a dual focus, establishing comprehensive ethical frameworks and aggressively investing in local innovation ecosystems. Ethical guidelines must be rooted in the values and social contexts of the Global South, prioritising fairness, transparency, and accountability. Simultaneously, strategic investment in local talent, data infrastructure, and computational power is essential to foster indigenous AI development that is both culturally relevant and aligned with national development priorities.

Towards a cooperative AI future

The alignment of AI with the Sustainable Development Goals is perhaps the most defining technological challenge for the BRICS+ community this decade. AI is not a magic bullet, but a sophisticated tool whose effectiveness depends on the policy architecture surrounding it.

The BRICS+ nations, collectively representing a majority of the world's population and burgeoning economies, possess the scale and political will to champion a new model of AI development. One that prioritises human-centric, ethical deployment and South-South collaboration. By cooperating on data governance, sharing best practices, and strategically funding local R&D, the bloc can ensure that AI catalyses equitable progress, securing not just technological dominance, but genuinely inclusive growth for all its members and the wider Global South.

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PRIVACY VS SECURITY:

HOW GC^{2}T'S PRODUCTS ADDRESS THE CHALLENGE

In our data-driven world, the distinction between privacy and security is critical but often misunderstood. While used interchangeably, they serve different, interdependent purposes. Understanding this relationship is vital, and at GC^{2}T (Global Command and Control Technologies), we design products that honour both.

Privacy is the right to control how information is collected, used, and shared. It relates to trust, autonomy, and compliance.

Security, by contrast, refers to the measures taken to protect data and systems from external threats. Simply put, security ensures that private data stays private.

However, enhancing one does not always guarantee the other. Intrusive surveillance may compromise privacy, while weak security leaves data vulnerable. The challenge lies in achieving a delicate balance, preserving confidentiality without sacrificing resilience.

This is where GC^{2}T excels.

GC^{2}T's suite of military-grade products, CipherMAIL, CipherCHAT, and CipherWAN, delivers layered encryption and secure channels that fortify security while upholding the principle of privacy-by-design. Our technologies offer end-to-end protection for mission-critical intelligence and high-risk environments without compromise.

- **CipherMAIL**
  ensures secure, authenticated, and encrypted email communications, protecting against phishing and eavesdropping.
- **CipherCHAT**
  provides encrypted messaging and voice channels, ideal for sensitive military or government communication.
- **CipherWAN**
  acts as a secure gateway for remote networks, protecting the perimeter without exposing internal data flows.

At GC^{2}T, we believe security is the foundation and privacy is the promise. Our products empower clients with both, ensuring data remains protected, confidential, and compliant.

In an era of digital warfare and cyber espionage, choosing a partner who understands the nuance between privacy and security is essential. With GC^{2}T, your information is secure, your rights are protected, and your mission is enabled.

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CipherMAIL

PROTECTING YOUR EMAIL, PRIVACY AND REPUTATION

Global Command and Control Technologies' advanced CipherMAIL is designed to provide comprehensive protection, ensuring the confidentiality, integrity, and availability of critical data.

Encrypt your words,
secure your world:
with CipherMAIL
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In today's hyper-connected world, where digital interactions underpin every facet of our lives, the need for CipherMail has never been more critical.

Without CipherMAIL, organisations risk devastating breaches that can compromise sensitive information, disrupt operations, and erode trust.

CipherMAIL PROTECTS YOUR EMAIL AGAINST:

- **Internal Email Threats** – Emails are stored encrypted on your computer, providing privacy from nefarious parties seeking access to your hosted mailbox
- **External Email Threats** - Emails are encrypted during transit, protecting the contents in the event of external parties intercepting your confidential communication

Investing in CipherMAIL is not just a defensive strategy; it's a proactive commitment to safeguarding your future, ensuring business continuity, and maintaining the integrity of your digital ecosystem.

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CipherCHAT

PRIVACY IS YOUR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

CipherCHAT is an enterprise-grade, self-hosted communication platform designed for organisations that require absolute control and sovereignty over their data. Unlike consumer messaging apps, CipherCHAT is a self-deployed solution, meaning all communications are managed on your own servers, ensuring no third-party access to sensitive information.

An African
Cyber Security Solution
for Global Threats
GC2T.COM
Own the conversation
with CipherCHAT

Do you OWN the Data?

Do you MANAGE the Platform?

Do you CONTROL users and their Access?

For organisations where data sovereignty and confidentiality are non-negotiable, CipherCHAT provides a self-hosted, end-to-end encrypted communication platform that you completely control. Unlike consumer messaging apps that store your data on third-party servers, CipherCHAT is deployed on-premise, ensuring total privacy. It integrates secure messaging, file sharing, and voice/video calls directly into your existing workflow.

Privacy when it matters most

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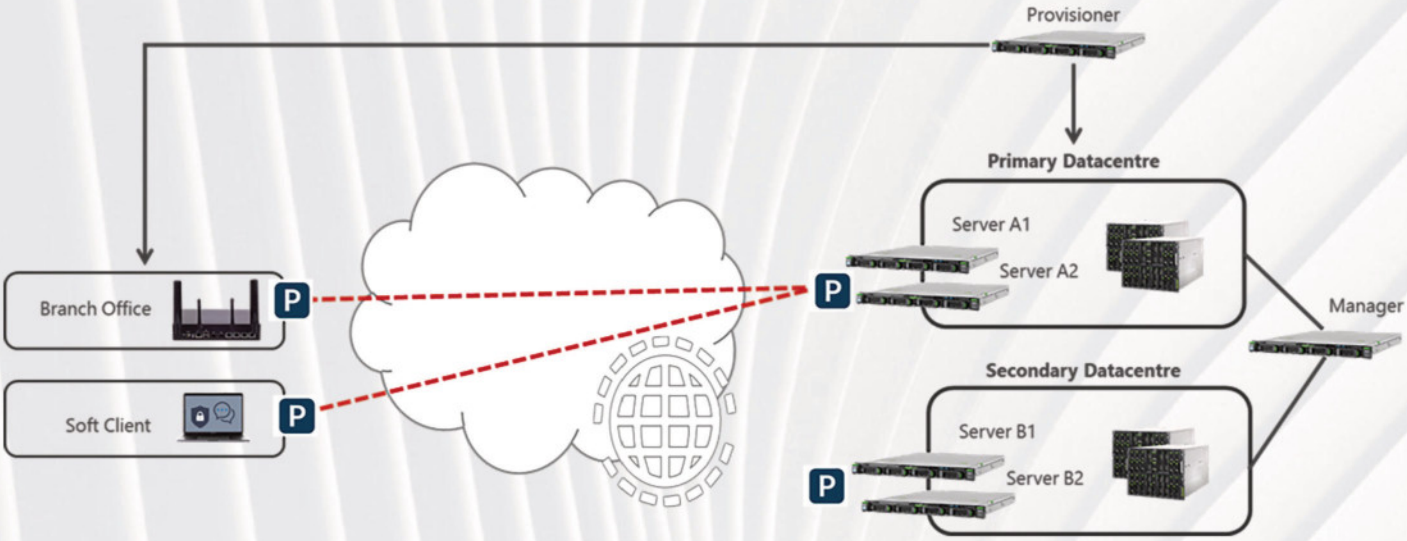
CipherWAN

PROTECTING YOUR EMAIL, PRIVACY AND REPUTATION

In today's hyperconnected world, the security of wide area networks (WANs) is paramount for organisations across all sectors. Global Command and Control Technologies (GC^{2}T) has responded to this challenge with CipherWAN, a comprehensive cybersecurity solution designed to protect network communications from a spectrum of cyber threats, including hacking, malware, and phishing attacks.


Provisioner
Primary Datacentre
Server A1
Server A2
Manager
Branch Office
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P
P
Soft Client
P
Secondary Datacentre
Server B1
Server B2
P

GC^{2}T's CipherWAN represents a pivotal advancement in network security technology, offering organisations a robust solution to protect their communications networks from the growing frequency and sophistication of cyber threats. By integrating cutting-edge technology with comprehensive management tools, CipherWAN provides not just security but peace of mind, enabling organisations to focus on their core operations without the looming threat of cyber disruptions.

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DATA PROTECTION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

TRUST, POWER, AND THE NEXT FIVE YEARS

Sesona Mdlokovana, Associate and Africa Specialist, BRICS+ Consulting Group

A new era of digital responsibility

Data protection in the Global South is no longer a technical afterthought; it is one of the main political and economic battlegrounds. More people are online than we have ever witnessed. An estimated 5.5 billion people, about 68% of the world, were using the internet in 2024. Yet access and protections are still deeply uneven, with roughly one-third of the world still offline, mostly in rural and low-income areas. This unequal connectivity decides who benefits from digital growth and who is exposed to harm and exploitation.

A number of countries in the Global South have moved swiftly to build legal frameworks. For example, India's Digital Personal Data Protection Act (2023) introduces new rules for how personal data is collected, processed, and transferred, indicating stronger oversight of cross-border flows.

South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA) is now administered by an active Information Regulator that has issued high-profile rulings in recent years. Kenya and Nigeria have data protection authorities that have started issuing fines and guidance. Combined, these reforms signal growing political will; governments do not only want control, they want citizen trust and economic value from their data ecosystems.

Challenges of fragmentation and enforcement

Regardless of these advances, there are three major gaps that persist. The first is regulatory fragmentation: differing rules across countries, diverse interpretations of cross-border data transfer, and inconsistent localisation requirements make compliance expensive for firms and confusing for citizens. The second is limited enforcement capacity. A lot of regulators lack sufficient technical infrastructure, skilled staff, and funding to monitor powerful corporations or to respond to large-scale data breaches. The third is market dominance by global technology giants. In many developing economies, a handful of foreign platforms control user data, forcing regulators to depend on company cooperation or face lengthy, resource-draining legal battles.

Recent enforcement actions emphasise both progress and strain. Nigeria's data authority fined Meta over serious privacy concerns, while Kenya sanctioned local banks for breaches, showing regulators' preparedness to act decisively. Yet these cases are also revealing of systemic challenges, limited compliance monitoring, contested penalties, and corporate resistance.

To combat this, the African Union's Data Policy Framework (2022) aims to harmonise standards, create shared governance structures, and build an African digital single market. If executed effectively, it could reduce fragmentation and strengthen collective bargaining power. However, strong national institutions and political commitment are needed for these frameworks to translate into real protection.

The future: AI, sovereignty, and cooperation

Looking beyond 2025, three forces are going to define the next phase of data protection in the Global South. Artificial Intelligence will intensify both opportunity and risk, as massive datasets fuel machine learning and automation. Decisions about how training data is sourced, processed, and shared are going to determine who benefits economically and who is left behind. BRICS and G20 platforms are increasingly debating digital sovereignty, algorithmic transparency, and equitable access to data, areas where Global South voices have to shape the conversation.

Cross-border data governance is also going to become a central issue. Excessive localisation may isolate economies, while weak transfer rules may expose citizens to exploitation. Finding a balance between privacy, innovation, and trade will require global coordination and regional coherence.

Finally, trust and enforcement are going to be the make-or-break factor. Regulators have to be independent, well-funded, and transparent. Civil society, investigative journalists, and academia have the responsibility to play watchdog roles to ensure accountability. Citizens, too, have to be empowered with digital literacy, understanding their rights, the value of their data, and how to demand protection.

Data protection in the Global South is sitting at a defining crossroads. It has the potential to evolve into a tool for inclusive growth and digital justice, or become another layer of dependency and inequality. The outcome will depend on whether countries build not just laws, but real capacity, cooperation, and courage, before the next technological wave decides for them.

AFRICA'S AI REVOLUTION

SEVEN STARTUPS TRANSFORMING THE CONTINENT'S FUTURE

Wesley Diphoko, Editor-In-Chief, Fast Company South Africa

Africa is rapidly emerging as a significant player in the global Artificial Intelligence (AI) landscape, leveraging this technology to address unique local challenges and drive innovation. Seven African countries, in particular, are at the forefront, showcasing leading AI startups and impactful implementations. South Africa, Kenya, and Nigeria are prominent among these.

Aerobotics

Since its inception in 2014 in Cape Town, South Africa, Aerobotics has been driving agricultural innovation by integrating drone technology with AI. The company uses drones and high-resolution satellite imagery to collect detailed data on crop conditions, soil health, and pest infestations. Through advanced machine learning analysis, Aerobotics converts this aerial data into precise, actionable insights, enabling farmers to optimise water usage, apply targeted treatments, and monitor crop health in real-time. This technology helps farmers reduce resource waste and improve yields, contributing to more sustainable and efficient agricultural practices. Operating in 18 countries, Aerobotics has achieved up to 95% accuracy in crop yield estimation, assisting South African citrus farmers in increasing yields through precise water and pesticide use.

Batazia

Born from a personal challenge faced by former CEO Barbara Gwanmesia regarding the lack of support for African languages on major self-publishing platforms, Batazia specialises in AI-driven translation and localisation. Working with over 3,000 African languages, Batazia aims to disseminate knowledge using advanced language AI technology, promoting inclusivity and safeguarding culture across Sub-Saharan Africa. This initiative has significantly improved educational outcomes by increasing literacy rates and school retention, particularly among learners studying in their mother tongues. By digitising and translating content into indigenous languages, Batazia is preserving linguistic heritage and empowering millions with equitable access to knowledge.

CDIAL (Centre for Digitization of Indigenous African Languages)

Based in Lagos, Nigeria, with offices in Los Angeles, CDIAL was founded in 2021 by Yinka Iyinolakan, Soji Akinlabi, and Shona Olalere. The company focuses on localising digital access by developing AI-driven language tools, such as the Indigenius Mobile app and a multilingual smart keyboard, supporting 180 African languages. Their mission to bridge Africa's digital divide has earned them notable accolades, including a $50,000 prize at Pharrell Williams' Black Ambition demo day. CDIAL's tools have reached over 100,000 users and boosted rural e-commerce transactions in Nigeria by 30%. With a vision to make the internet accessible in African languages, CDIAL aims to resolve communication barriers, enhance literacy, preserve linguistic heritage, and unlock economic opportunities. Their impact includes integrating over 13 languages into generative AI models, supporting more than 180 languages for typing, and benefiting 857+ schools with multilingual education tools.

DataProphet

Established in 2013 in Cape Town, DataProphet evolved from a machine learning consultancy into a cornerstone of AI-driven manufacturing. The company specialises in predictive analytics, quality control, and process optimisation. Their machine learning solutions address manufacturing challenges such as predictive maintenance and production optimisation. By leveraging advanced sensors, real-time data analysis, and deep learning algorithms, DataProphet helps manufacturers reduce waste, improve quality, and boost overall efficiency. With successful projects in automotive, aerospace, and food processing, DataProphet's innovations are driving the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Their PRESCRIBE AI solution enabled Atlantis Foundries to halve its scrap rate and achieve an external scrap rate of less than 0.1%. Mercedes-Benz is among the companies that have utilised DataProphet's technologies.

InstaDeep

Founded in 2014 in Tunis, Tunisia, InstaDeep initially focused on web design before pivoting to AI in 2017 with a vision to democratise advanced AI technology. Its acquisition by BioNTech for approximately $682 million in January 2023 underscores its value in AI-driven innovation. InstaDeep utilises advanced AI techniques and research data to develop adaptive systems that assist businesses in complex decision-making across various industries, including healthcare, finance, logistics, biology, electronic design, and energy. Their versatile technology empowers data-driven decisions and enhances operational efficiency, setting a global benchmark. InstaDeep has powered numerous projects, including an Early Warning System for SARS-CoV-2 variants, achieving 92% accuracy in prediction.

Zindi

Founded in 2016 in Cape Town, Zindi has become a leading platform for data science, focused on solving real-world challenges across Africa. The platform connects a diverse community of over 80,000 data practitioners from 52 African nations and 185+ countries worldwide, enabling collaboration on projects in sectors like agriculture, healthcare, finance, and public policy. Zindi also offers mentorship and resources, fostering continuous learning and inclusion, with approximately 28% of its users being women – a figure surpassing typical representation in tech.

Zipline

Founded in 2014 in the US, Zipline is a global leader in autonomous drone delivery, specialising in on-demand logistics for medical and commercial supplies. With operations in Rwanda, Ghana, Nigeria, and beyond, Zipline's drones have completed over 1.4 million deliveries, covering more than 100 million autonomous miles. This technology ensures the timely delivery of critical supplies, even in challenging terrains and weather conditions. In Rwanda, Zipline's services have reduced blood delivery times by 61% and decreased blood unit expirations by 67%. In Ghana, their operations have shortened vaccine stock-outs by 60% and increased the availability of medicines at health facilities by 10%. These achievements highlight Zipline's role in revolutionising healthcare logistics and improving access to essential medical supplies in remote regions.

These companies collectively demonstrate Africa's robust commitment to leveraging AI for social and economic advancement, positioning the continent as a vital contributor to the global AI ecosystem.

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SECURITY BRIEF

CYBERSECURITY, SOVEREIGNTY AND DIGITAL TRUST

Dr Ntswaki Matlala, Senior Lecturer at Johannesburg Business School (JBS), and Lerato Teane, MBA Candidate at JBS

In the 21st century, governments no longer merely guard frontiers of land and sea; they also compete over control of the digital realm. For countries globally, the imperative to build resilient cybersecurity, assert digital sovereignty, and foster digital trust is particularly acute. These three pillars are deeply interwoven: without sovereignty, there is little control; without trust, adoption of digital services falters; without strong cybersecurity, neither sovereignty nor trust can endure.

Cybersecurity in the Global South: Rising threats, fragile defences

Cyber threats do not wait for development; they exploit it. Globally, weaker infrastructure, limited human capacity, and fragmented regulatory regimes exacerbate risk.

Take the case of mobile money and fintech platforms in Africa. Nations such as Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria have adopted robust cybersecurity policies on paper, but enforcement and sectoral coordination are weak, undermining user confidence in digital financial systems.

Similarly, in Latin America, municipalities have fallen prey to ransomware attacks that cripple urban services, a reminder that weak local governance can become a national vulnerability.

Thus, cybersecurity must be viewed not as a technical issue, but as a system-of-systems issue, linking governance, human capital, infrastructure, and international cooperation.

Digital sovereignty:
What it means, and why it matters

Digital sovereignty (also called cyber-sovereignty, data sovereignty, technological sovereignty) refers to a country's ability to exercise authority and control over its digital infrastructure, data, and the rules governing them.

In Africa, digital sovereignty is often conflated with data localisation, requiring that data generated within a country be stored and processed domestically. But critics argue that localisation is not, by itself, sovereignty, especially when infrastructure and management are controlled by foreign corporations.

For example, several African countries are investing in national data centres (Benin, Senegal, Togo) as part of their sovereignty agenda, but face challenges of power reliability, cooling, connectivity, and affordability.

In South Africa, scholars have proposed models of digital sovereignty that encompass not only data location but a domestic stack, meaning ownership of hardware, middleware, cloud platforms, and digital public infrastructure.

Elsewhere, Latin American countries such as Brazil and Mexico are debating similar questions: How much control to assert without stifling innovation or discouraging foreign investment.

Digital trust:
The "glue" that holds the system together

Digital trust is the citizen's belief that online systems, government platforms, and private services operate reliably, safely, transparently, and accountably. Without trust, adoption stalls.

In Africa, mistrust of government systems is a serious obstacle. Many citizens are wary of handing over personal data to state agencies known for weak accountability.

In Brazil, the 2018 General Data Protection Law (LGPD) has become a key building block in restoring trust by clarifying consent, delineating processing rights, and mandating penalties.

In India, the Aadhaar system (a biometric ID) has sparked frequent debates. While it enables scale and efficiency, concerns over data leaks, misuse, and a lack of redress have eroded citizen confidence.

In countries where mobile money is widely used (e.g., Kenya's M-Pesa or Ghana's mobile wallets), robust security practices and visible safeguards have helped establish trust, but breaches and fraud still quickly erode public perception.

Interplay and tensions:
Sovereignty, security and trust

These three pillars, namely, cybersecurity, sovereignty, and trust, do not always align. Many countries walk a fine line, asserting control while preserving openness and innovation.

A promising path lies in regional coordination. In Africa, for instance, a harmonised approach to data centres, cyber norms, and procurement can improve bargaining power and reduce duplication.

Data embassies are another intriguing concept. Instead of building a data centre in every country, a trusted partner state can host critical national data under treaty-based sovereignty arrangements.

Recommendations and the way forward

To build resilience in cybersecurity, sovereignty, and trust, states and stakeholders in the countries could consider:

Adopt a layered sovereignty model

Combine state oversight with private-sector and civil-society participation. Avoid extreme control that stifles innovation or civil liberties. For example, Singapore's "Whole-of-Nation" approach, coordinated by the Cyber Security Agency (CSA), integrates government, industry, and citizens through shared frameworks such as the Singapore Cybersecurity Strategy 2021. This layered governance model balances national sovereignty with multi-stakeholder trust, positioning Singapore among the most cyber-resilient nations globally.

Focus on capacity building

Invest heavily in human capital, including cybersecurity professionals, forensic experts, and legal-technical teams, and strengthen institutions such as Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) and national cyber agencies. For example, Rwanda has made capacity building a cornerstone of its National Cyber Security Policy, establishing the National Cyber Security Authority (NCSA) and partnering with international universities to train local experts. This investment has helped reduce incident response times and attract secure digital investment.

Promote regional cooperation and economies of scale

Pool resources for joint data centres, threat intelligence sharing, common procurement, and interoperable standards. For example, the African Union's Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection (Malabo Convention) and regional Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs) demonstrate early steps toward continental coordination, with Kenya and Nigeria championing collaborative intelligence sharing through the AfricaCERT network.

Embed privacy and accountability by design

Ensure that digital systems, especially those built by or for governments, incorporate audit logs, data minimisation, open standards, and built-in redress mechanisms. Singapore's "Security-by-Design" framework requires public systems to integrate privacy controls from inception, a model now being replicated across ASEAN states.

Strengthen legal frameworks and oversight

Enact comprehensive data protection, cybersecurity, and liability laws to ensure robust protection. Empower oversight bodies (e.g. data protection authorities, ombudspersons). For example, Kenya's Data Protection Act (2019) and the establishment of the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner demonstrate how well-drafted legislation, aligned with global standards like GDPR, can enhance digital trust while supporting innovation.

Encourage private sector and public–private trust partnerships

Trusted third-party audits, certifications, and independent oversight can reassure users. Singapore and South Korea exemplify mature collaboration models, where private telecoms and banks participate directly in national cyber drills and share anonymised threat data through trusted channels.

Engage citizens and civil society

Transparency, awareness campaigns, and participatory policymaking help build societal trust in institutions. Rwanda's "Cyber Hygiene for All" campaign, coupled with national awareness weeks, shows how inclusivity strengthens both trust and compliance.

Plan for future tech domains

Emerging fields such as AI, IoT, quantum, and edge computing should be integrated into sovereignty, security, and trust frameworks from the outset. Singapore and the UAE are incorporating AI governance, quantum risk frameworks, and IoT security standards into their national cyber strategies, ensuring preparedness beyond today's threats.

Globally, the stakes of cybersecurity, sovereignty, and digital trust are particularly high. Too much external dependency weakens autonomy; too much control erodes legitimacy; too little protection exposes societies to harm. The art and the imperative are to balance these principles, to govern rather than dominate, protect rather than constrain, and to build trust as much as control.

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PROSPECTS FOR A BRICS CURRENCY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE G20

Dr Bradley Bordiss
Senior Research Fellow at the School of Economics and Finance at the University of the Witwatersrand

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When formulating a currency policy for BRICS countries, it is important to start with economic fundamentals. Mainstream economists often assume that economics is a hard science, like physics, with laws that apply universally, regardless of country, in the same way that gravity does. The dominant neoclassical school assumes that all prices in an economy, from raw materials to labour and capital, are mere commodities where if their price adjusts sufficiently, the quantities in the free market will clear – full employment is achieved, the raw materials are sold, and capital and other factors move effortlessly to all sectors, creating balance.

By this logic, there is no reason why BRICS should not have a single currency, and for that matter, no reason why capital, labour and goods should not move freely across Africa, BRICS countries and indeed the world. There is a word for this model – it is called neoliberalism. In practice, it operates in a world directed by a powerful hegemon. In the last 70 years, that hegemon has been the United States of America, and the argument in favour of its "rules-based order" came to be known as Hegemonic Stability Theory.

From hegemony to multipolarity: The BRICS alternative

But there is an alternative view of this theory. One that calls neoliberalism as it is practised by a hegemon by another name – imperialism. This alternative view is the one embraced by BRICS. Instead of one currency, the US Dollar, being used in one unipolar neoliberal system, BRICS is committed to a multipolar economy. And yet so many of us in BRICS are so indoctrinated into neoclassical economics in a neoliberal global economy, that our thoughts are directed like zombies to wanting to create a single BRICS currency with the free movement of capital, labour and goods across a global BRICS economic system. Why on earth would we want to recreate the economic system that we are currently escaping from?

The answer is that that is the last thing that we want to be doing. But to quote John Maynard Keynes (1936): "The difficulty lies, not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones." A single glance across the de-industrialised United States and Britain is enough to realise that neoliberalism has not worked. Anti-imperialists from Antonio Serra (1613) to Raúl Prebisch (1950) to Walter Rodney (1972) to Samir Amin (1974) to Ha-Joon Chang (2007) have all pointed out that the laissez-faire system run by the hegemon is designed to extract profit for the imperialist. The "core" is the primary benefactor, not the Global South "periphery".

Building a multipolar monetary future

So how does BRICS develop a monetary and currency system that serves our stated goal of a multipolar world economy, and not fall back into the mental straitjacket of a unipolar one? The answer lies in our own resolutions. For the last three BRICS conferences, we have committed to establishing payment mechanisms to pay for the exports of other BRICS countries, essentially in the currency of the exporter. Russia and China have done this; Iran has done this. But what progress has South Africa made in this direction almost three years after our government first committed us to this noble aim?

This simple resolution points to the key elements of development that have driven growth in China and other BRICS countries. Global neoliberalism does not bring development; national economic sovereignty does. When you run your economy in your own sovereign currency, with your own monetary policy, you can figure out what mixture of policies works for you. Contrary to the lies of the Washington Consensus, it is not one-size-fits-all; it must be tailor-made at a national level. Fantasies about one Africa, with one currency, and with the free movement of capital, labour and goods must be called out for what it is – dangerous neoliberal rubbish. China's incredible development over the last thirty years has been a national miracle. Russia only started to grow at well above the norm once it stopped flirting with the idea of being incorporated into the Western capitalist system and focused instead on national development.

By trading in each other's currencies, we encourage the countries in BRICS to utilise all their levers of national development – monetary, fiscal and industrial policies – and to avoid the straitjacket of a global neoliberal imperialist framework.

TEN YEARS ON

THE NDB'S GROWING ROLE IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Josia Moyo, Deputy Director: Research and Policy Development, South African BRICS Youth Association

The New Development Bank (NDB) continues to solidify its fast-growing role as a central financial hub for the Global South. Established in 2015 by the BRICS nations – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – the NDB's core mandate is to mobilise resources for infrastructure and sustainable development while promoting a fairer global financial order. Ten years on, the bank has grown, and continues to. At this point, it can no longer be overlooked in discourses surrounding alternatives to traditional global financial institutions that are normally dominated by developed economies.

Growing membership

A focal point of the bank's progress has been its growing membership. In its first wave of expansion in 2021, the Bank admitted the United Arab Emirates, Bangladesh, Uruguay and Egypt. The second wave of expansion followed this year with the admission of Algeria, Colombia, and Uzbekistan – bringing the total membership to 11 countries. This expansion is a testament to the NDB's commitment to broadening its representation and strengthening cooperation across regions of the Global South. Several other applications are currently under review, following internal procedures designed to ensure transparency and strategic alignment. There are, however, reports that one of the countries under review could be Malaysia.

The NDB's model of governance

The NDB's governance model sets it apart from traditional global financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Its framework is grounded in equality among members. All countries, whether large or small, have an equal voice in decision-making. There is no system of veto power, and decisions are reached through consensus or qualified majority. This approach, coupled with the bank's rejection of political or economic conditionalities, ensures that member states retain full sovereignty over their development priorities. Projects are evaluated primarily on their technical and developmental merits, not on imposed external policy prescriptions.

Financial performance and investment strategy

The bank's financial performance and operational reach have expanded progressively. As of October 2025, the NDB has approved 120 projects worth a total of US$39 billion, of which more than US$22 billion has already been disbursed. These projects cut across a wide range of sectors, including logistics infrastructure, renewable energy, health system modernisation, and digital transformation.

According to Dilma Rousseff (President of the NDB), the bank's investment strategy is guided by four strategic pillars: logistics infrastructure, digital transformation, social infrastructure, and energy transition. Together, these priorities align with the most pressing development challenges of the 21st century – sustainable connectivity, technological sovereignty, social inclusion, and the shift toward clean energy. The bank has also shown strong performance in the capital markets, having raised over US$16 billion in 2024 through bond issuances in various currencies. These competitive issuances, with narrow spreads over standard rates, draw attention to the renewed investor confidence in the NDB's financial stability.

Local-currency financing

Local-currency financing has become a defining feature of the Bank's operations. The NDB aims to reduce exposure to exchange-rate volatility and lessen dependency on the US dollar by issuing loans in members' domestic currencies. For instance, South Africa's recent $398 million loan agreement with the NDB to upgrade critical freeways and infrastructure was denominated in rands. Approximately 25 per cent of the bank's lending portfolio is already denominated in local currencies of the BRICS countries, a figure set to rise to 30 per cent in 2026. This approach undoubtedly supports the development of local capital markets and strengthens financial resilience among member countries.

The road ahead

According to Rousseff, the NDB's strategy for the next decade focuses on four main objectives: broadening membership to enhance representativeness, attracting private capital through risk-mitigation mechanisms, strengthening research partnerships to advance innovation, and expanding local-currency operations. Moreover, while the bank recognises the continued dominance of the US dollar, the steady rise of local-currency financing should be seen as a healthy diversification of the global financial system.

Ten years after its establishment, the NDB stands as one of the most tangible institutional achievements of BRICS cooperation. The growing membership base, a robust portfolio of sustainable projects, and an inclusive governance model position the bank as a pragmatic and credible platform for financing development in the Global South.

BY THE GLOBAL SOUTH FOR THE GLOBAL SOUTH

RETHINKING DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EVIDENCE

Prajna Naidoo, Evaluation Analyst, Ashwani K. Muthoo, Director General, and Manas Puri, Senior Professional, New Development Bank's Independent Evaluation Office

The Global South is increasingly recognised as a centre of innovation and applied expertise that sustains integral functions of the global economy. Emerging and developing economies account for nearly 90% of the world's primary commodity exports, supplying much of its productive labour and intellectual talent. Africa holds about 30% of global mineral reserves, Asia leads in manufacturing inputs, and Latin America remains a leading exporter of agricultural goods and lithium for clean energy. Yet, value-chain asymmetries persist, and about 80% of value added in global trade continues to be captured elsewhere.

The New Development Bank (NDB) aims to support nationally owned growth and resilience through development finance and partnerships tailored to the needs of emerging economies that maintain the core fabric of the global economy. Within this framework, the Independent Evaluation Office (IEO) provides evidence-based assessments that help the Bank and its members learn from experience, enhance performance, and ensure that results remain relevant to the evolving needs of the Global South.

NDB member countries represent 45% of the global population, with 86% of those populations residing in emerging markets and developing economies, making the NDB a multilateral institution by the Global South, for the Global South. With over 120 projects approved, amounting to USD 40 billion in investments, the bank's influence is already significant.

Evaluation in the Global South requires sensitivity to local realities, using metrics that reflect what progress means within each country's own social, environmental, and institutional framework.

In a decade, the NDB has evolved from an ambitious experiment in South-South finance into a proven platform for shared growth. Its vision rests on a core belief that development is most sustainable when it draws on the wisdom of context and the discipline of evidence. Across its evaluations, the IEO has found that in:

South Africa: Renewable-energy projects expanded capacity and reduced emissions, but they require stronger coordination across national transition strategies that are essential for systemic impact.

India: Road and solar investments have accelerated connectivity and climate goals, although efficiency gaps and procurement delays highlight the need for integrated approaches that holistically address the country's objectives.

Brazil: Co-financed urban programmes illustrate the promise of shared ownership, though sustainability depends on fiscal stability at the municipal level.

China: High-performing infrastructure projects demonstrate excellence in delivery, but also remind us that approaches must adapt where institutional maturity differs.

As South Africa leads the G20 under the theme "Solidarity, Equality, Sustainability," the global conversation on development finance draws upon the Global South as a teacher of development effectiveness. Evaluation plays a central role in this process; identifying what works, enabling adaptation across contexts, and grounding reforms in evidence rather than assumption. It shows that accountability and adaptability are not competing goals, but complementary ones, where global comparability can coexist with local integrity when guided by equal partnership and mutual learning across the Global South and beyond.

South African
Finance Minister
Enoch Godongwana

THE NDB

CHARTING A PATH FOR A MULTIPOLAR FINANCIAL FUTURE

Cole Jackson, Lead Associate, Chinese and South American Specialist, BRICS+ Consulting Group

As the BRICS partnership enters a new phase of expansion and global relevance, the New Development Bank (NDB) stands as one of its most tangible institutional achievements. The NDB was created to rebalance global finance, providing emerging economies with a greater voice, flexibility, and access to development capital. Over the past decade, it has evolved from a political vision into a working example of how multilateral finance can operate beyond the dominance of traditional Western institutions.

Redefining development finance

The NDB's greatest contribution has been its capacity to innovate within structure. By prioritising sustainable infrastructure, renewable energy, and social inclusion, the bank has redefined what development finance can mean in a multipolar world. It has approved more than $30 billion in loans across BRICS member states, supporting projects that directly impact communities, from water management and energy transition in South Africa, to smart urbanisation in China and transport modernisation in India.

Yet the bank's success lies not only in numbers, but in its philosophy of equitable governance. Each BRICS member contributes no more than 49% capital and is equal in decision-making, ensuring that influence is not determined by economic size but by partnership. This model contrasts sharply with traditional lending institutions, where voting power often mirrors geopolitical hierarchy. The NDB's approach demonstrates that finance can be both inclusive and efficient, balancing sovereignty with shared responsibility.

Expanding reach, navigating challenges

The NDB has expanded to deepen collaboration with other regional financial institutions and countries. It understands that expansion not only provides a space for broader inclusion, for countries like Bangladesh, Egypt, and the UAE, but also assists in reducing interest incurred on bonds and loans taken by the NDB. This signals its growing reach as a Global South institution with global relevance, a practical expression of BRICS' commitment to reforming the international financial order.

However, the NDB faces clear challenges. Global interest rate hikes, dollar volatility, and the need to raise funds in local currencies test its ability to remain competitive and resilient. Governance alignment across diverse member economies also requires constant negotiation and trust. These challenges, often seen as weaknesses, are the realities of constructing new financial architecture in an era of shifting global power dynamics. When mitigated, they can be increasingly advantageous.

A platform for shared prosperity

The NDB's next phase will depend on its ability to become a platform for innovation and collaboration, blending public finance, digital transformation, and green technology. By championing local currency financing, the bank can help member states reduce exposure to external shocks while strengthening regional financial ecosystems. Its continued expansion underlines that the project of financial multipolarity is not about replacing one centre of power with another, but about creating a fairer, more representative global system.

As BRICS+ expands, the NDB embodies the spirit of experimentation and inclusivity that defines this new era. It is not just a bank, it is a statement of intent: that the Global South can design its own instruments, fund its own priorities, and shape its own development future.

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TRADE'S NEW MAP

Chloé Maluleke,
Associate and Russia & Middle East Specialist, BRICS+ Consulting Group

From African ports to Asian highways, new trade routes are quietly rewriting the rules of global commerce. The weaponisation of tariffs by the West, most recently under Donald Trump's renewed trade measures, has pushed developing nations to find growth beyond Western approval. Instead of waiting for access to old markets, countries across the Global South are opening new pathways, building connections across Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America.

South–South trade

The BRICS alliance sits at the centre of this shift. Together, its members represent over 40% of global GDP and nearly one-third of world trade, according to the IMF. But their power lies not just in numbers; it lies in networks. South–South trade has more than tripled since 2000, now exceeding $5 trillion annually, driven by partnerships that blur old geographic and political boundaries.

Brazil's agricultural exports to Africa have climbed by over 25% in the past five years, India's digital and pharmaceutical sectors are expanding across the continent, and China continues to finance over 60 major ports, rail, and energy projects in Africa alone. These are not acts of aid, they're acts of alignment, building a web of interdependence across emerging markets.

Africa's trade awakening

The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the world's largest free trade zone by membership, aims to connect 1.4 billion people across 55 nations. According to the UN Economic Commission for Africa, AfCFTA could boost intra-African trade by more than 50% by 2030, cutting tariffs and simplifying customs procedures.

The AfCTFA is about more than moving goods; it's about driving value. It is rooted in turning African raw materials into African wealth. Think of Ghanaian cocoa processed into chocolate in Côte d'Ivoire, or Ethiopian textiles stitched from local cotton and sold across the continent. Every new trade route becomes a thread in a larger fabric of self-determination.

On the ground, trade corridors are the arteries of this change. The Lamu Port–South Sudan–Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor, the North–South Corridor from Durban to Lusaka, and the Central Corridor through Tanzania are turning once-landlocked economies into regional hubs. The BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) has already committed more than $30 billion to such infrastructure, roads, ports, and railways, helping build the literal foundations of a new economic geography.

From dependency to design

For much of the post-colonial era, global trade resembled a one-way street. Raw materials flowing out of the Global South and finished goods for the North flowing back in. Tariffs and sanctions were used to maintain this hierarchy. But as Western economies slow and protectionism rises under the banner of "national security," the South is shifting from dependency to design.

Of course, challenges remain with fragmented customs systems, infrastructure gaps, and the need to ensure that small businesses share in the gains, but the groundwork has been laid. With AfCFTA advancing, BRICS expanding, and regional supply chains strengthening, the next chapter of trade is already being drafted, not in Washington or Brussels, but in Nairobi, São Paulo, Mumbai, and Shanghai.

A world rewired

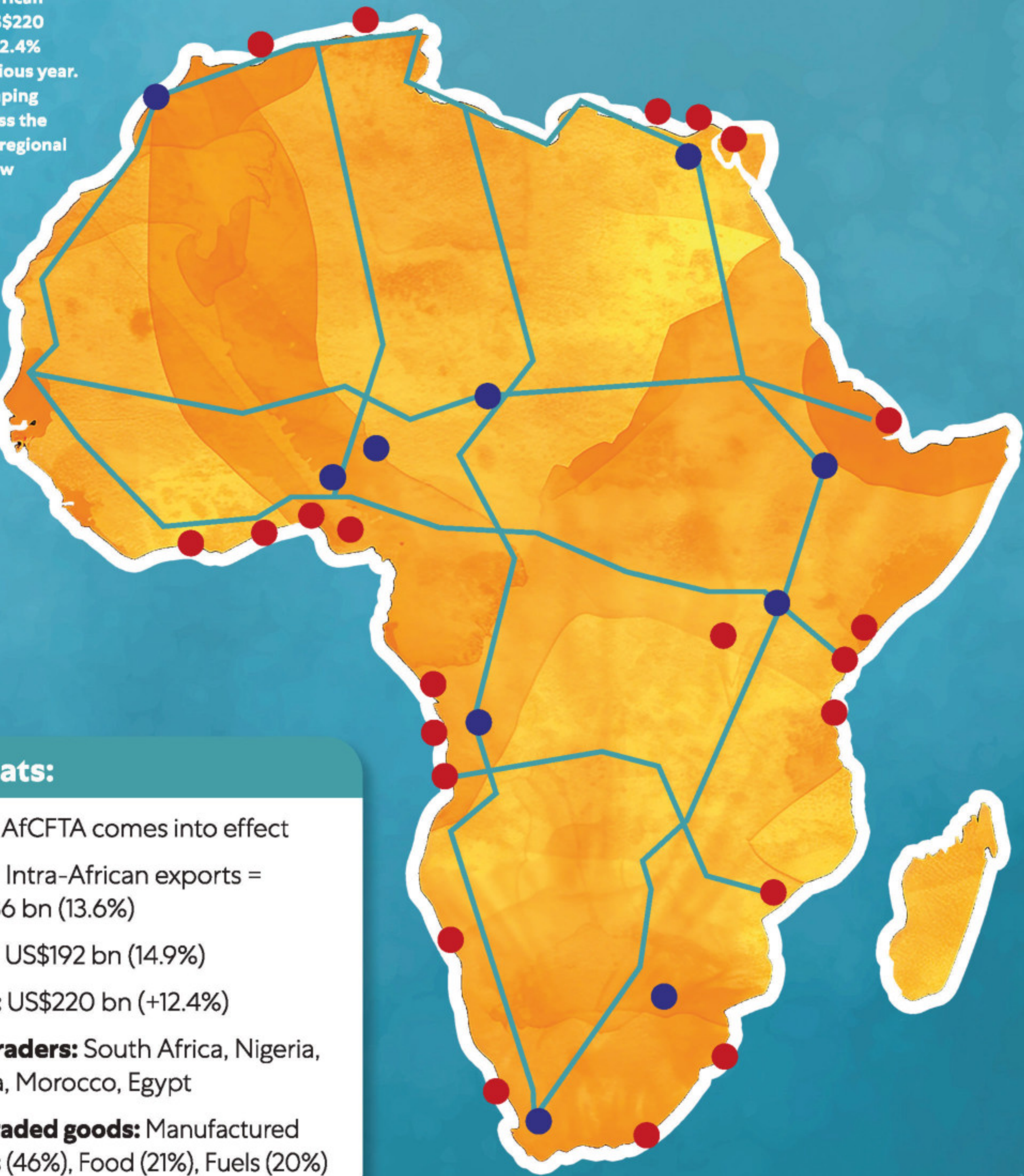
Tariffs may have been weaponised, but the Global South is no longer playing defence. It's building resilience, one corridor, one partnership, and one port at a time. What's emerging is not just a new trade network, but a new philosophy of globalisation, one built on cooperation rather than control, and on shared prosperity rather than inherited privilege.

image/ freepik.com

CONNECTING MARKETS, BUILDING A CONTINENTAL ECONOMY

Chloé Maluleke, Associate and Russian & Middle Eastern Specialist, BRICS+ Consulting Group

Intra-African trade is finally gaining traction. Once stuck at 12-14% of total African trade, it reached US$220 billion in 2024 — a 12.4% jump from the previous year. The AfCFTA is reshaping trade patterns across the continent, creating regional value chains and new markets for African goods.



Quick stats:

- **2021:** AfCFTA comes into effect
- **2022:** Intra-African exports = US$186 bn (13.6%)
- **2023:** US$192 bn (14.9%)
- **2024:** US$220 bn (+12.4%)
- **Top traders:** South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Morocco, Egypt
- **Top traded goods:** Manufactured goods (46%), Food (21%), Fuels (20%)

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF GROWTH

TARIFF REDUCTIONS

AfCFTA targets 97% tariff elimination across goods.
Simplified rules of origin make it easier for SMEs to export.

REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Cross-border corridors, ports, and logistics hubs are key to unlocking trade.
PAPSS (Pan-African Payment and Settlement System) is cutting currency-conversion costs across the continent.

MANUFACTURING MOMENTUM

Intra-African trade in manufactured goods is rising fastest — especially in automotive, pharmaceuticals, and processed food sectors.

POLICY INTEGRATION

54 signatories, but just 24 countries currently trading under AfCFTA rules.
Progress depends on harmonising regulations and reducing non-tariff barriers.

THE 2045 VISION — AFRICA'S TRADE FUTURE IN NUMBERS

+30-45%	US$450-60 BILLION	US$7 TRILLION	+10 MILLION	KEY GROWTH FACTORS
Growth in intra-African exports projected by 2045	Potential annual value of intra-African trade	Continental market by 2035	Jobs created across regional value chains	Energy, Manufacturing Digital Services, Green Economy

TRADE IN TRANSITION

A 2025 REFLECTION AND THE ROAD TO 2030

Chloé Maluleke, Associate and Russia & Middle East Specialist, BRICS+ Consulting Group

As 2025 draws to a close, global trade stands at a historic crossroads. The post-pandemic years have transformed supply chains, realigned geopolitical loyalties, and deepened the strategic assertion of the Global South in a system once dominated by Western economies. From BRICS expansion to the US's turn toward tariff nationalism under a second Trump presidency, trade has once again become a language of power, one that speaks not only of markets but of identity, sovereignty, and global influence.

The rise of South-South trade and BRICS+ influence

Over the past year, BRICS+ nations have accelerated efforts to redefine the terms of South-South cooperation. Intra-BRICS trade surpassed US$500 billion in 2024, with members such as China, India, and Russia expanding preferential agreements across Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East. The inclusion of Iran, Egypt, the UAE, Ethiopia, Thailand and other partner countries has diversified both the bloc's energy base and its political leverage in global forums. South Africa, as both the African voice in BRICS and a key player in the G20, has increasingly positioned itself as a bridge between the developing and developed worlds.

While the Global South advances integration, the broader global trade landscape has become more fragmented. The reimposition of US tariffs on Chinese goods in 2025, framed as an attempt to "re-shore American jobs", has reignited debates about protectionism and the politicisation of trade. The European Union, meanwhile, continues to double down on carbon border adjustment mechanisms, effectively taxing imports from industrialising economies in the name of green policy. For emerging nations, this signals a future in which trade will be increasingly shaped by sustainability criteria, digital compliance, and regional resilience rather than pure liberalisation.

Fragmented globalisation and South Africa's multilateral moment

Still, this shift may not be entirely regressive. As multilateral institutions like the World Trade Organisation (WTO) grapple with stalled reform, regional frameworks such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Mercosur-ASEAN cooperation, and BRICS+ currency and settlement initiatives suggest a future where trade governance becomes more plural and less hierarchical. South Africa's multilateral moment, reflected in its dual leadership roles in BRICS+ and the G20, demonstrates the growing agency of medium-sized powers in shaping inclusive trade norms that prioritise equitable growth and technology transfer.

Predictions for 2030: Regionalisation, digitalisation, and green trade

Looking ahead to 2030, three trends are likely to define global commerce. First, regionalisation will deepen, and supply chains will continue to shorten as nations prioritise security over efficiency. Second, digitalisation and the AI-driven trade ecosystem will reduce transaction costs and enhance cross-border visibility, giving smaller economies greater access to value chains. And third, sustainability-linked trade instruments, from carbon credits to green bonds, will become key determinants of competitiveness.

Trade, therefore, is no longer merely an economic function but a political instrument, a means of asserting vision in a multipolar world. For the BRICS+ community and the Global South at large, the challenge of the next five years will be to turn strategic solidarity into structural reform. The world is rebalancing. By 2030, the direction of that balance will depend on how courageously the South continues to trade, not only in goods, but in ideas, technologies, and trust.

image/ freepik.com

SIPHO MOSAI'S STORY

WHEN LEADERSHIP MEETS LEGACY

How his leadership turned Rand Water into a resilient organisation in a changing climate

Before becoming Group Chief Executive (GCE) of Rand Water, Sipho Mosai served as Chief Operations Officer for 10 years. With a foundation in science, he has evolved into a strategist and visionary leader whose experience continues to shape innovation and transformation within South Africa's water sector.

With over two decades in the field, Mosai has held roles spanning executive management and technical operations in bulk and distribution water systems.

His expertise covers infrastructure planning, maintenance, refurbishments, project management, and scientific services.

He has also contributed to strategic asset management and sector development, serving on the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB), where he chaired both the Human Resources and Audit and Risk Committees.

Mosai's qualifications include a BSc and BSc (Honours) from the University of the North (now the University of Limpopo), a Master of Science from the University of the Free State, and an MBA and Postgraduate Diploma in Management from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Visionary leadership

Under Mosai's leadership, Rand Water has gained global recognition for providing water of the highest quality, consistently meeting and surpassing national and international standards. Serving more than 18 million people across Gauteng, North West, Mpumalanga, and the Free State, Rand Water has strengthened operational efficiency, built strategic partnerships, and driven sustainability, positioning itself as a thought leader in the industry.

"I have remained an advocate for corporate social responsibility and community engagement,

ADVERTORIAL

spearheading initiatives that go beyond water supply to address broader socio-economic challenges," Mosai says.

His focus on attracting and developing top-tier talent aligns with Rand Water's mission to build a high-performance culture, ensuring that municipalities, local authorities, mines, and industries receive the water they need.

Creating a lasting impact

Mosai's leadership has solidified Rand Water's role in meeting the region's urgent water needs. Yet, he emphasises that progress requires public cooperation.

"It is important that the public's attitude and behaviour towards water usage is reshaped for the sake of their livelihoods and future."

To this end, Rand Water has launched awareness campaigns such as Water Wise, encouraging conservation and responsible practices. The Communicators Forum, chaired by Rand Water's Communications Division, collaborates with municipalities to design strategies that promote sustainable water use and equitable supply.

To realise its vision, Rand Water has set strategic objectives centred on growth, operational integrity, innovation, and financial sustainability. "Rand Water is committed to engaging its stakeholders through open communication and collaboration," says Mosai.

Sound financial management remains vital. Through prudent fiscal discipline, the organisation continues to strengthen its position while delivering on its social mandate.

Commitment to Rand Water's values

Rand Water's operations are rooted in strong values — equity, integrity, partnership, excellence, and care.

"Equity stands at the forefront, ensuring fair and just treatment for all stakeholders," Mosai says. "Integrity builds trust through transparency and ethical practices, while a spirit of partnership drives collaboration and shared success."

These values underpin Rand Water's pursuit of excellence and its commitment to community well-being. Mosai's blend of scientific and managerial expertise has guided the organisation toward sustainable growth and innovation.

Recent flagship projects reflect this drive — including the 210-million-litre Vlakfontein reservoir and the 600-million-litre-per-day Zuikerbosch Station 5A purification plant, inaugurated by President Cyril Ramaphosa in August 2025.

Financially, Rand Water achieved 11.4% revenue growth to R21.8 billion and 15.3% gross income growth to R7 billion, maintaining a margin above 30%. Net income rose 29% to R4.56 billion, underscoring financial strength despite economic headwinds.

The utility successfully redeemed its RW21 and RW23 bonds, together worth R2.8 billion, and later issued three sustainability-linked bonds totalling R1.7 billion — attracting over R4.5 billion in bids.

Rand Water became the first state-owned company in Africa to issue such bonds, earning the Bonds & Loans Africa Award (2022) — a testament to investor

confidence and fiscal integrity.

Innovation and research

Through the Rand Water Institute, the organisation continues to lead in research and technology, developing new solutions to enhance water supply and management. The Institute promotes collaboration and knowledge sharing, positioning Rand Water as a local and global thought leader in the water industry.

Addressing non-revenue water

Mosai and the public share concerns about non-revenue water - losses from leaks estimated at 1.6 billion litres per day across Gauteng. The No Drop certification measures water-use efficiency, focusing on physical losses, consumption, and management practices.

According to the Department of Water and Sanitation's 2023 report, only four Water Services Authorities achieved certification, compared with 44 in 2014. Non-revenue water rose nationally from 37% to 47%, with Gauteng's level at 49.5%, among the highest in the country.

Dr Sean Phillips, Director-General of Water and Sanitation, noted that water interruptions stem not from insufficient bulk supply, but from municipal losses and high consumption. South Africans average 218 litres per person daily, above the global 173, while Gauteng averages 279.

Reducing losses requires better maintenance, education, pressure management, leak repair, and revenue collection. Rand Water partners with financially strained municipalities to drive efficiency and accountability.

The Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) model

A notable innovation is Rand Water's partnership with the Emfuleni Local Municipality (ELM) through a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV). This model brings together Rand Water, municipalities, and private investors to upgrade, operate, and maintain water infrastructure under a single, ring-fenced entity.

Consumers pay the SPV directly, ensuring funds go exclusively to water and sanitation services. Governance structures, including Audit, Risk, and Investment Committees, provide professional oversight.

Complying with key legislation such as the Public Finance Management Act and Water Services Act, the SPV aims to deliver reliable, high-quality water while attracting sustainable investment, a reimagined model for municipal service delivery.

Leading the change

Under Mosai's guidance, Rand Water has achieved major operational milestones - restoring pump stations 2, 8, 9 and 10, rehabilitating Sebokeng Modules 5 and 6, and revamping the Vaaloewer Water Treatment Plant. These facilities now meet all regulatory standards and improve regional supply reliability.

Collaboration with municipalities has led to the creation of Rand Water Services, a subsidiary dedicated to executing special projects and pursuing new water-service opportunities.

In addition to No Drop, the Blue Drop and Green Drop certifications measure performance in drinking water and wastewater systems respectively. A recent Blue Drop report revealed a decline in national water quality since 2014, yet Gauteng — largely supplied by Rand Water — achieved the highest ratings: 62% of its systems were rated excellent or good, with none categorised as poor.

Dr Phillips credited this success to Rand Water's effective management. Mosai adds: "This supports Rand Water's consistent assertion that its water meets the South African National Standard (SANS), ensuring it is safe for human consumption."

The future of Rand Water

Under Mosai's stewardship, Rand Water is committed to securing a reliable water supply while expanding access to water-

related services through the Rand Water Foundation. The Foundation coordinates Corporate Social Investment (CSI) projects that support community development and education in partnership with donors and stakeholders.

The utility's mission extends beyond commercial objectives — it acts as a strategic driver of socio-economic growth, aligned with national and continental development goals. Mosai's focus on equity and care reflects a belief that access to clean water is a matter of social justice and sustainability.

"The future of South Africa looks like one of hope, preservation, and effort," Mosai says.

"Rand Water's vision is to be the cornerstone of sustainable, competitive water and sanitation solutions for Africa. Our mission is clear: to meet the expectations of customers, partners, and government by developing cutting-edge skills, maintaining financial health, and nurturing productive partnerships."

image/ freepik.com

THE SMART CITY IS HUMAN

Dagnachew Amberbir Ketema,
Architect and MPhil candidate in Urban Studies, African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town

The convergence of the BRICS and G20 agendas in 2025, under South Africa's theme of Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability, offers a pivotal moment to redefine what "smart infrastructure" means for the Global South. As discussions on inclusive growth, food security, and the governance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) take centre stage, our understanding of urban development must return to its most vital layer: people and their everyday spaces.

Africa's evolving smart infrastructure cannot be built solely on imported, capital-intensive technologies. Such approaches risk creating digitally advanced enclaves that exacerbate the inequalities the G20 aims to address. True smart infrastructure must be rooted in inclusive urbanism and climate-resilient planning, recognising the ingenuity already present in African urban life.

Re-engineering the smart city from the ground up

African cities, from Cape Town to Addis Ababa, already possess sophisticated, people-driven systems. Informal networks, walking cultures, and community-led spatial practices function as living infrastructure that connect traditional urban forms with modern governance. The future of smart cities lies in supporting these human-scale systems; decentralising innovation, improving accessibility, and using community-based research to understand how people actually use space.

Resilient cities emerge when digital tools strengthen these existing systems rather than replace them. For Africa, the "smart city" must also be the just city – one where technology serves equality, mobility, and social connection.

Governance and digital transformation

The G20's focus on AI and data governance is directly tied to infrastructure justice. As African cities pursue digital transformation, new governance frameworks must ensure that data serves equality rather than surveillance or exclusion. Policy must ask: Are we using technology to enhance everyday life, or to reinforce existing divides?

Transparent, community-driven decisions about public space, mobility, and digital access are essential. Technology should bridge gaps, not create new ones.

A people-centred vision for Africa's urban future

Smart cities in Africa must act as engines for inclusive growth and sustainable industrialisation. The New Development Bank and other multilateral actors should prioritise investments that strengthen local, climate-responsive infrastructure and expand equitable access to digital tools.

For South Africa's G20 Presidency, placing Africa's development at the top of the agenda means recognising that the most successful smart city is one where technology disappears into the background, where life, commerce, and community thrive with greater solidarity, equality, and sustainability.

The path to a resilient Global South is built not only with fibre-optic cables but also with sidewalks, public spaces, and the shared vision of a just urban future.

THE RISE OF HUMAN-CENTRED SMART CITIES IN AFRICA

Smart city development in Africa is shifting from a technology-first to a people-first approach. As digital and physical infrastructure expand the focus is shifting toward inclusive design, socio-spatial justice, and community resilience.

Addis Ababa
Cape Town

Quick stats:

Urban growth: Africa's urban population to double by 2050 (UN-Habitat).

Digital access: Internet penetration rising from 33% (2022) to 50%+ (2025 projection).

Smart city initiatives: 30+ projects across Africa (Ethiopia, Rwanda, South Africa, Egypt).

Top priorities: Mobility, housing, energy, and governance.

BUILDING THE JUST CITY

COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE

Everyday networks (safer, local associations) as invisible smart systems.

Human-centred data collection through participatory mapping and spatial observation.

INCLUSIVE MOBILITY

Integration of digital ticketing with informal transport.

Walkable, 15-minute city principles for accessibility and equity.

DIGITAL GOVERNANCE

Data for inclusion, not surveillance.

Transparent, community-driven decision-making.

CLIMATE-RESILIENT DESIGN

Smart grids and renewable systems in Cape Town.

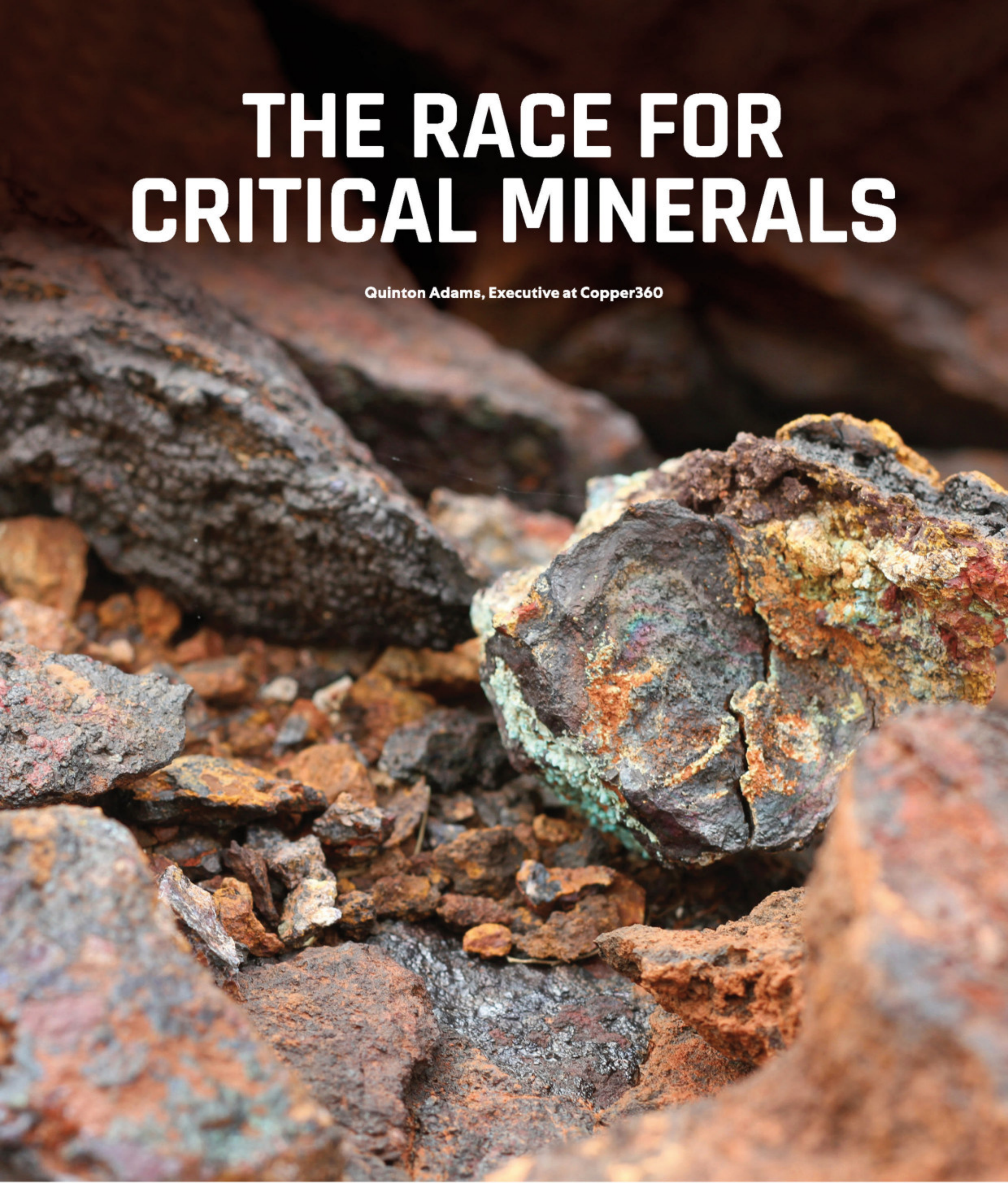
Green infrastructure for heat, flooding, and water management.

AFRICA'S URBAN FUTURE IN NUMBERS

70%	+60%	+10 MILLION	TOP INNOVATION HUBS:	KEY SECTORS:
of Africa's infrastructure of 2050 yet to be built.	expected increase in demand for digital services by 2030.	jobs possibl in green and digital urban sectors.	Addis Ababa, Kigali, Cape Town, Accra.	Mobility, energy, data governance, and climate adaptation.

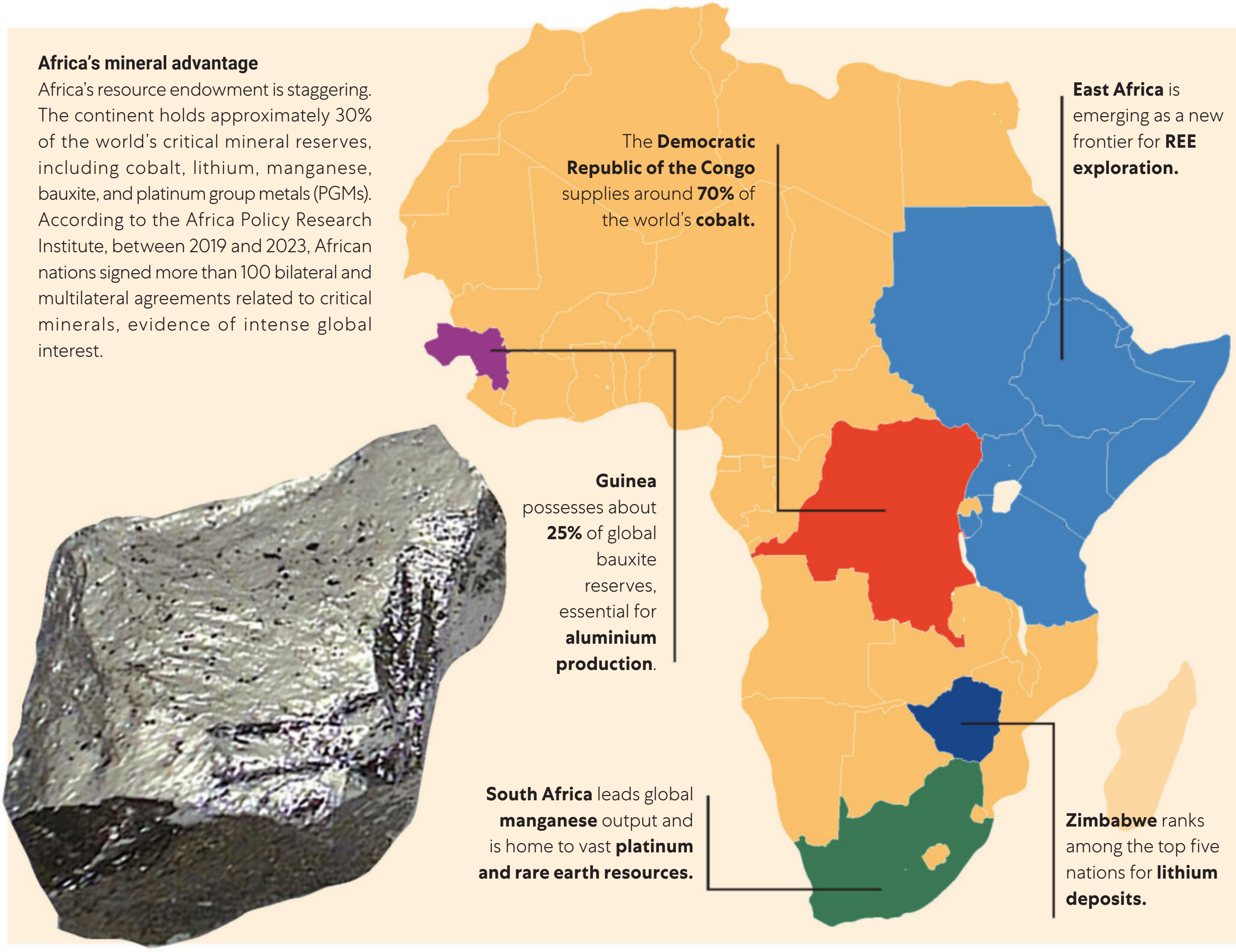
THE RACE FOR CRITICAL MINERALS

Quinton Adams, Executive at Copper360



Critical minerals have surged to the forefront of global politics and economics. As the world transitions to renewable energy and digital technologies, minerals such as lithium, cobalt, copper, nickel, and rare earth elements (REEs) have become the backbone of modern industry, powering electric vehicles, wind turbines, smartphones, and defence systems.

In his book *Africa: Crude Continent*, Duncan Clarke chronicled the early 2000s oil and gas scramble in Africa, where over 500 companies from six continents competed for fossil fuel resources. Two decades later, that competition has evolved. The new rush is not for barrels of oil, but for the minerals that will define the future of energy and technology.



Africa's mineral advantage
Africa's resource endowment is staggering. The continent holds approximately 30% of the world's critical mineral reserves, including cobalt, lithium, manganese, bauxite, and platinum group metals (PGMs). According to the Africa Policy Research Institute, between 2019 and 2023, African nations signed more than 100 bilateral and multilateral agreements related to critical minerals, evidence of intense global interest.

The **Democratic Republic of the Congo** supplies around **70%** of the world's **cobalt.**

East Africa is emerging as a new frontier for **REE exploration.**

Guinea possesses about **25%** of global bauxite reserves, essential for **aluminium production**.

South Africa leads global **manganese** output and is home to vast **platinum and rare earth resources.**

Zimbabwe ranks among the top five nations for **lithium deposits.**

A global race for green power

The energy transition is not new to human civilisation. From wood to coal, coal to oil, and now oil to renewables. What makes this transition different is its urgency. If global temperature rise is not curbed by 2030, the consequences for ecosystems and economies alike will be irreversible.

Critical minerals lie at the centre of this transformation. The World Bank estimates that the demand for lithium, graphite, and cobalt could increase by nearly 500% by 2050, driven by electric vehicles and renewable energy storage systems. Yet, the supply of these minerals is highly concentrated.

China dominates 50–70% of global refining for lithium and cobalt, and nearly 90% of REE processing, according to the International Energy Agency (IEA). The geopolitical implications are profound as control over critical minerals now translates into control over the technologies of the future.

But investment in the sector is slowing. IEA data shows that global spending on critical minerals grew by just 5% in 2024, compared to 14% in 2023, signalling caution amid market volatility and regulatory uncertainty. This slowdown threatens to delay the very green transition the world urgently needs.

Policy shifts and strategic frameworks

Governments worldwide are racing to secure their place in the critical minerals value chain. Since 2022, the IEA's Critical Minerals Policy Tracker has documented over 450 national policies across more than 35 countries, many aimed at reducing environmental and social harms while securing supply.

South Africa took a significant step in 2025, approving its Critical Minerals Strategy, designed to leverage national strengths in PGMs, lithium, and cobalt to advance the country's energy transition. Similar strategies are emerging in Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Zambia, each aiming to add local value, attract sustainable investment, and avoid the historical pitfalls of extractive dependency.

However, these strategies also signal a new geopolitical playbook. Competition over critical minerals is reshaping foreign policy, trade alliances, and even security doctrines. As nations jostle for access, there is a growing risk that the benefits of Africa's mineral wealth will once again bypass its people.

The new scramble for Africa's minerals

The African Union's African Mining Vision (2009) and Commodities Strategy (2019) both call for value addition, regional integration, and industrial development, yet implementation remains uneven. The establishment of the African Minerals Development Centre in 2016 was a step forward, but translating strategy into tangible beneficiation remains Africa's defining challenge.

With global critical mineral revenues projected to reach US$400 billion annually by 2050, Africa stands at a crossroads: it can either replicate the extractive patterns of the oil era or rewrite the rules for equitable and sustainable growth.

Africa's mineral wealth is not merely geological; it is geopolitical. The continent's role in supplying the raw materials for the digital and green revolutions gives it unprecedented bargaining power, but only if it acts collectively and strategically.

The G20's responsibility and the path forward

At this year's G20 Summit, South Africa's Minister of Mineral and Petroleum Resources, Gwede Mantashe, proposed a Critical Minerals Framework, a crucial step toward global accountability. Many G20 nations are both the largest emitters of carbon dioxide and the biggest consumers of critical minerals. Aligning their consumption patterns with just, transparent, and sustainable sourcing is

essential.

The framework's core message is clear: critical minerals are not merely economic assets but instruments for inclusive growth, local beneficiation, and climate justice. If governed equitably, these value chains can create millions of green jobs, generate public revenue, and catalyse investment in infrastructure, education, and health systems across the Global South.

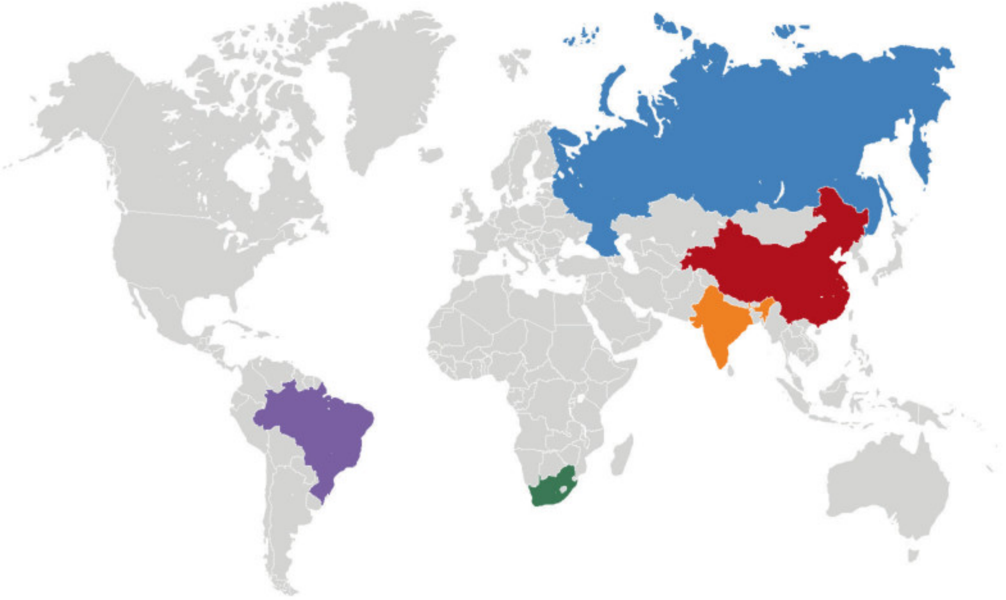
But this requires a fundamental mindshift, from extraction to empowerment. Africa must move beyond being the world's quarry toward becoming a manufacturing and innovation hub in its own right.

From extraction to equity

The scramble for critical minerals mirrors the colonial extractive rush of the 19th century, yet the stakes today are existential. The choices made in the next decade will determine whether Africa becomes a passive supplier of the green revolution or its co-architect.

Investing in sustainable mining, transparent governance, and regional value chains is not just good policy; , it is Africa's path to industrial sovereignty. The continent holds the keys to the world's green transition. What remains is to ensure that this time, those keys unlock Africa's own prosperity first.

AFRICA'S CRITICAL MINERALS: POWERING THE GLOBAL TRANSITION



30%

Africa holds nearly **30% of the world's proven critical mineral reserves**

(IMF, 2024 I WEF, 2025)

$50

Expected to attract **US$50 billion in new investments** for mineral production by 2040

(IEA, 2024)

10%

Yet receives **less than 10% of global exploration spending**

(WEF, 2025)

BREAKDOWN

Minerals	Africa's Global Share	Leading Countries
Co Cobalt	60% of world supply	DRC, Zambia
Mn Manganese	40% of reserves supply	South Africa, Gabon
Pt Platinum - Group Metals (PGMs)	88% of reserves supply	South Africa, Zimbabwe
Li Lithium	RAPIDLY RISING	Zimbabwe, Namibia
Cu Copper	10% of global output	Zimbia, DRC

SOUTH AFRICA: THE BRICS ANCHOR OF THE MINERALS AGE

South Africa holds:

88% of global PGM reserves

80% of Manganese reserves

72% of Chromite reserves

Production Leadership:

59% PGM output

39% Ferrochrome

25% Vanadium

17% Manganese ore

SOUTH AFRICA'S BRICS MOMENT
A BRIDGE BETWEEN WORLDS

Gillian Schutte, writer and filmmaker

The tectonic plates of global power are shifting. Western dominance, long sustained through financial control and military reach, is losing its unchallenged grip. Emerging powers are building new institutions, forging new alliances, and crafting alternative visions of the future. At the centre of this unfolding story stands BRICS — no longer a loose acronym, but a living formation shaping the contours of a multipolar world.

And at the southern tip of Africa stands a country uniquely placed to anchor this shift: South Africa.

image/ freepik.com

A historic bridge

South Africa's entry into BRICS in 2010 was never just about numbers. It was about symbolism, history and strategy. It brought liberation credentials forged in the anti-apartheid struggle, a unique position on the African continent, and a capacity to speak to multiple worlds. Its inclusion ensured that Africa — the youngest, most resource-rich and geopolitically decisive continent of this century — was not left outside the multipolar conversation.

South Africa became the bridge: between the Global South and North, between continental aspirations and global realignments, and between historical resistance and future possibility.

The BRICS vision

Over the past decade, BRICS has quietly laid the groundwork for a parallel global order. It has established the New Development Bank, advanced de-dollarisation by encouraging trade settlements in local currencies, and is actively exploring the creation of alternative payment platforms that reduce reliance on Western financial systems. It has also opened for non-Western scientific, technological and energy cooperation. The bloc is expanding rapidly, attracting states that no longer want to be confined to the orbit of a single power centre.

In this unfolding architecture, South Africa's role is not ornamental. It has hosted pivotal summits, brokered delicate diplomatic conversations, and, crucially, opened the doors for African states to shape global decisions. The 2023 Johannesburg Summit, where BRICS expanded to include Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the UAE, Ethiopia, and Iran, was a moment of historical weight — and Pretoria was at the heart of it.

Energy and industrial renaissance

South Africa's industrial and energy capacity gives it another layer of strategic importance. The country holds advanced nuclear infrastructure, deep mineral wealth, and industrial know-how that, if aligned with BRICS partners, could underpin a regional economic revival.

Chinese investment in infrastructure, Russian expertise in nuclear energy, Indian innovation in pharmaceuticals and digital systems — these are structures already taking shape. They are opportunities to rebuild what neoliberalism decimated: railways, energy grids, ports, factories and technological capacity.

Through BRICS, South Africa can shift from a model of extraction and dependency to one of co-development and shared sovereignty. It can help forge industrial corridors that run from the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean, powered by African resources but owned in partnership, not controlled from abroad.

Diplomatic leverage

South Africa's diplomatic role is equally critical. It stands as a mediator with historical links to the West, yet deep ties to the Global South. It can speak both languages, and that makes it an indispensable balancer in a world where the risk of hardened blocs is real. Rather than being a passive player, South Africa can actively shape conversations, translating continental positions into global strategies.

Claiming the stage

The world is watching. BRICS has grown from five to a powerful constellation of 10 member states, representing the majority of humanity. New institutions are taking shape. New rules are being written. South Africa is not a bystander in this process, it is one of the architects.

The question now is whether it will claim this moment fully. Will it move beyond procedural diplomacy and step into visionary leadership? Will it leverage its energy sovereignty, its industrial backbone and its continental legitimacy to shape the future, not simply follow it?

South Africa's BRICS moment is here. It is a chance to step onto the world stage not as a junior partner, but as a bridge between worlds — Africa's voice in a multipolar order. History rarely offers such moments twice.

TURNING IDEAS INTO IMPACT

A conversation with Rayhaan Survé,
Chairman of the Survé Family Office and Founder of iAccelerate South Africa

In a world where young people are increasingly shaping the future of innovation, iAccelerate South Africa (iASA) stands out as a movement redefining entrepreneurship. Founded by Rayhaan Survé, Chairman of the Survé Family Office, iASA equips young changemakers with the skills, mentorship and mindset to turn ideas into impact.

As the world looks to South Africa for the G20 Summit, we sat down with Rayhaan to discuss how iASA is empowering the next generation of leaders, ensuring a more inclusive and resilient Global South.

What inspired you to bring the iXperiment model from Romania to South Africa?

What inspired me about iXperiment was seeing the incredible impact it had on young people and the fact that it was youth-led. The challenges the team in Romania were tackling felt very similar to those faced by young South Africans. The realisation that opportunity and struggle often mirror each other globally really motivated me. Entrepreneurship education has the unique power to unlock potential, and I wanted to bring that impact home. Fortunately, my fiancée, Mara Steiu, founded iXperiment ten years ago. Seeing the programme's impact through her eyes, I asked if she'd support me in launching it here. She was thrilled to see it expand to South Africa. That's how it began, and today, iAccelerate SA empowers teenagers in public schools to think and act like entrepreneurs.

How would you describe iAccelerate's core philosophy – what makes it more than "just another entrepreneurship programme"?

Honestly, we're not trying to be extraordinary, just deeply intentional. Our philosophy is simple: empower people so they can empower others. That creates a ripple effect where individual transformation builds collective impact. Our goal isn't only to develop entrepreneurs but to nurture changemakers who uplift their communities and, eventually, the continent. What truly sets iAccelerate apart is what happens after the programme. Once students pitch their businesses and complete the four-month journey, they leave with a lasting network. Every two months, we host Community Days, bringing alumni together for workshops, mentoring and networking. At our last session, we held a LinkedIn workshop and one-on-one mentor meetings to discuss students' life goals. iAccelerate isn't just a programme, it's a lifelong community. The best part? Every graduate said they want to mentor the next cohort. For me, that's real success, impact that multiplies.

Can you share a story or example of a participant whose project embodies the spirit of iAccelerate?

There were many, but one that stands out is Ukukhanya Wellness Organisation, focused on mental health. The students, aged 14 to 17, noticed how gender-based violence and mental health weren't openly discussed in their communities. So, they created safe spaces where people could talk about their struggles through storytelling and film. It's young people recognising a social challenge and deciding to solve it themselves. Entrepreneurship can take many forms, and for them to lead that kind of initiative at such a young age is incredible.

Many youth programmes focus on skills; iAccelerate focuses on mindset. How do you cultivate that shift from job-seeking to changemaking?

Most entrepreneurship programmes focus on venture building, and that's important, but it's only part of what we do. Our goals are threefold. First, we build an entrepreneurial mindset: confidence, creativity, and problem-solving that students can apply anywhere, in school, work, or life. Second, we prepare them for the next steps, like job interviews or university applications, by helping them build resilience and adaptability. And third, we support venture creation, guiding them to turn ideas into real businesses.

If at the end of the programme only a few ventures continue, but every student walks away thinking differently, confident, resourceful, solution-oriented, that's a win. Our goal is lifelong impact, not short-term success.

The BRICS and G20 Summits are spotlighting youth innovation and entrepreneurship in the Global South. How does iAccelerate fit into that global conversation?

It aligns perfectly. I'm optimistic because I see South African youth as key problem-solvers not just for our country, but for the continent and beyond. They're smart, driven, and ready to lead change; they just need the right tools. The fact that BRICS+ and G20 are prioritising youth entrepreneurship validates our mission. I'd love to see youth given a formal platform at these summits. A space not just to be celebrated, but to contribute meaningfully. Imagine BRICS nations connecting young entrepreneurs with investors and mentors across borders.

iACCELERATE

What lessons can countries in the Global South learn from one another about empowering young entrepreneurs?

There's so much we can learn. In India, for example, entrepreneurship education is being implemented at a massive scale, reaching millions. In Vietnam, programmes focus on smaller, more personal engagement. Both models work, and both offer valuable lessons.

The key is collaboration, not competition. Countries in the Global South should share experiences and best practices openly. By learning from one another, we can build more effective programmes that uplift young people across regions.

How can cross-border collaboration strengthen local innovation ecosystems?

On a youth level, collaboration should start with cultural and entrepreneurial exchanges. Imagine South African students working with peers from Brazil or India to solve shared problems. The challenges are similar, and so are the solutions. These exchanges encourage open dialogue, creativity, and mutual learning.

At a higher level, governments and businesses must work together. Policy frameworks, trade agreements, and private-sector innovation all play a role. Take the example of Brazil's neobanks; they've thrived there, and South Africa has the ecosystem to host similar ventures. Collaboration between governments and businesses could make that possible, driving innovation across borders.

What role can academia play in nurturing youth innovation?

Academic exchange is just as vital for students, faculty, and institutions. Entrepreneurship shouldn't sit apart from traditional disciplines. We need to integrate it into law, engineering, and science, so students in any field learn to think entrepreneurially.

I've seen inspiring examples in China and India, where universities link STEM and business departments to help technical students develop entrepreneurial mindsets. This approach speeds up innovation and turns research into viable solutions. For BRICS and the Global South, such partnerships could happen not only within universities but across continents.

What's next for iAccelerate South Africa?

For now, we're focused on getting it right in Cape Town, building strong foundations with smaller cohorts. Then we plan to expand to Johannesburg, Durban, and eventually into Sub-Saharan Africa. We also want to grow beyond high schools, creating programmes for university students and young professionals. Partnerships will be key. As the African proverb says, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." Collaboration will drive our next chapter, linking education, investment, and entrepreneurship into one sustainable ecosystem.

What message would you share with young people across the Global South who want to make a difference but don't know where to start?

Start with the problem, not the solution. Find something in your community that needs fixing and gather people who care about it, too. Once you begin moving, momentum builds, possibilities open up. The hardest part is taking the first step, but that's where change begins.

And finally, what would you like world leaders at the G20 Summit to understand about Africa's youth?

Africa's youth are the future. We have the largest youth population in the world, an unstoppable force for innovation and growth. Whether they're leading from within the continent or abroad, young Africans will shape the next era. World leaders need to recognise that working with Africa's youth is not optional; it's essential. The future is African, and it's already unfolding.

image/ freepik.com

DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF AFRICAN LEADERS

Judy Sikuza, CEO, The Mandela Rhodes Foundation

Nelson Mandela once reminded us that: "We must take responsibility for the future, for shaping a world that is more humane, more just, more compassionate. We must reach across the divisions that history has created among us – and build bridges, not walls."

As the African continent navigates an increasingly multipolar world, we need leaders who can build those bridges across nations, languages, disciplines, and generations. We need leadership that is courageous, inclusive, and deeply anchored in integrity. And critically, we need to build leadership pipelines that prepare young Africans not merely to inherit broken systems, but to transform them into more just and equitable ones.

Defining next-generation leadership

The leaders Africa needs for the decades ahead must embody four key qualities: integrity, innovation, resilience, and a global outlook. Integrity gives leadership its moral centre. Innovation equips leaders to solve complex challenges in creative ways. Resilience allows them to remain anchored in their purpose through uncertainty. And a global outlook enables African leaders to operate confidently on the world stage while staying grounded in their local contexts.

Next-generation leadership in Africa must therefore be rooted in integrity, courage, and inclusion, values that do not simply guide decision-making but define the very character of our societies.

Education and leadership development

Education alone does not create transformative leaders. Africa's diversity is its greatest strength, but it also brings deep complexity. The kind of education that truly shapes visionary leadership cultivates both intellectual capacity and emotional intelligence, where technical skill meets ethical reflection.

When we integrate critical thinking, cross-cultural learning, and value-based decision-making into education, we produce leaders capable of navigating complex moral, political, and economic realities.

Inclusion as a lived practice

Africa is the youngest continent in the world. If our youth are excluded from opportunity, our collective future is compromised. Likewise, if women are not central to the leadership story, we forfeit half of our potential. Inclusion cannot remain an abstract ideal; it must be budgeted for, planned for, and lived in practice.

True leadership development happens when diverse perspectives are not just welcomed but centred. This is how innovation flourishes. When young people, women, and underrepresented communities are given real decision-making power, Africa's solutions become more creative, sustainable, and reflective of its people.

Strong institutions matter

Transformative leadership does not emerge in isolation. It requires enabling environments, strong institutions, and transparent governance systems. Across the continent, many young leaders encounter systemic barriers that hinder their growth, from visa delays that block academic exchange to qualification recognition processes that restrict mobility.

These are not small bureaucratic inconveniences; they are reminders that leadership development is as much about fixing systems as it is about nurturing individuals. To truly build Africa's leadership capacity, we must confront these challenges directly, advocating for policies that make opportunity accessible and internationalisation genuinely inclusive.

Technology as an enabler

Africa's future leaders must be digitally fluent. Digital access is no longer optional; it is the passport to participating in tomorrow's economies. Technology allows us to scale leadership development, expand access to education, and connect communities of practice across borders.

From online learning and language platforms to virtual leadership workshops and digital alumni networks, technology is breaking down traditional barriers of geography and privilege. For Africa's youth, digital fluency is not merely a skill; it is a form of empowerment and self-determination.

Pathways forward

Africa's future will be determined by how boldly we step into our collective agency as a continent. We must no longer view ourselves as passive recipients of external agendas, but as co-architects of the global future. This requires asserting our intellectual sovereignty, designing leadership and education programmes that reflect our realities, harnessing our strengths, and upholding our values.

Investing in Africa's human capital is not an act of charity. It is a global investment in innovation, sustainability, and stability. Our young population represents the world's largest reservoir of untapped creativity and problem-solving potential. For governments, institutions, and partners, investing in African talent today means co-creating the leadership capacity that will drive global growth tomorrow.

The leadership challenge before us is immense, but it is not insurmountable. It requires all of us educators, policymakers, funders, and young leaders to act with courage, humility, and commitment. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said: "The best way to eat an elephant is one piece at a time."

Each of us has a role to play in nurturing Africa's next generation of leaders. Through sustained investment in education, values-based leadership, and equitable partnerships, we can reshape the trajectory of our continent not only with our heads, but with our hearts.

The world is ready for Africa's full contribution. The question is: are we ready to claim our rightful place?

images/ freepik.com

LOOKING AHEAD: WHAT TO WATCH IN 2026

Sesona Mdlokovana, Associate and Africa Specialist at BRICS+ Consulting Group

In 2026, the global landscape will be shaped by the convergence of shifting international alliances, critical national elections, and conflicting multilateral priorities.

2026 headline items

India chairs BRICS (18th Leaders' Summit)

India will assume the BRICS rotating chair and will host the 18th BRICS leaders' meeting. Expect the agenda to prioritise digital public infrastructure, South–South cooperation, finance and development alternatives to the traditional Bretton Woods institutions.

The United States holds the G20 presidency and summit

The US will hold the 2026 G20 presidency and host the leaders' summit. Watch for US priorities on trade, technology governance, and alliances with a newly enlarged G20 that has now included the African Union as a permanent participant.

African Union influence continues to grow

The AU's permanent role in the G20 means that Africa's policy priorities (industrialisation, commodity value chains, debt architecture, climate finance and food security) will be on the table in a sustained way in 2026. Expect African delegations to push for tangible finance and investment commitments.

Dates to pin to your calendar

COP31

Countries are positioning bids (Australia has mounted a high-profile bid for Adelaide). Climate finance and industrial transition (green hydrogen, critical minerals) will be prioritised.

UN General Assembly (81st session)

The annual UNGA high-level week, opening on 8 September, will again be a stage for G20/BRICS leaders to set rhetoric and soft commitments ahead of summit cycles.

UN Security Council non-permanent seats election

Elections for rotating UNSC seats will happen in mid-2026; results will play a role in Africa's representation in a body central to geopolitical security discussions.

Elections that will shape geopolitics

United States - 3 November (midterm elections)

Congressional control will shape US domestic political bandwidth on trade and foreign policy during its G20 year.

Brazil - 4 October (general election)

Brazil's national vote will have an effect on South America's posture in BRICS, regional trade and climate policy coordination.

India - multiple state assembly and Rajya Sabha cycles

State results and upper-house composition matter for New Delhi's domestic mandate to chair BRICS and push international initiatives.

Multiple African national elections

Several African countries are scheduled for national polls in 2026, which will influence Africa's internal policy priorities (industrial policy, land/food security, natural resource governance) and shape the AU's negotiating posture at the G20/BRICS tables.

The key policy battles to follow

Development finance and the NDB vs. Bretton Woods architecture

BRICS will press New Development Bank lending and alternative financing vehicles; watch whether this yields concrete project pipelines in Africa and new currency-swap frameworks.

Technology and data governance (AI, data flows, digital public infrastructure)

Both BRICS and the G20 will debate rules for data, cross-border digital public infrastructure and AI governance; India's BRICS chair is likely to spotlight digital public goods and data sovereignty.

Climate finance and just transitions

COP31 and the G20 will be coordination points for financing decarbonisation, especially for Africa's energy transition and critical minerals supply chains.

Debt, trade and industrial policy for Africa

With the AU in the G20 and stronger BRICS-Africa ties, expect pressure for coordinated approaches to debt relief, local value-addition and preferential investment frameworks.

Three practical signals to watch

Summit deliverables vs. declarations: compare leaders' communiqués (BRICS and G20) against binding financing or trade commitments; language is cheap, new public finance flows are not.

Elections that change major economies: US midterms and Brazil's general election will shift bargaining power and the tone of cooperation or confrontation on trade and tech.

AU influence tested in practice: watch whether the AU's G20 seat delivers concrete policy wins on climate finance, food security and industrial policy for Africa.

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